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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE CHILDFREE ALTERNATIVE TO A FAMILY LIFESTYLE

BY

ROSEMARY I. MOULDEN

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1991

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE CHILDFREE ALTERNATIVE TO A FAMILY LIFESTYLE submitted by ROSEMARY I. MOULDEN in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Counselling Psychology.

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DATE: March/91

DEDICATION

To Jim, for the many wonderful years we have shared, and to my parents, with grateful appreciation for their love and support.

ABSTRACT

The decision to remain childfree is increasing in frequency. Many of the studies to date have neglected the husband's perspective and have dealt mainly with "childless" wives. The purpose of this study was to examine five aspects of voluntary childlessness: a profile of the childfree couple; reasons for choosing a childfree lifestyle; how the decision to remain childfree is made; criticisms, disadvantages and regrets of the childfree lifestyle; and commitment to remaining childfree. In order to study these components a structured questionnaire, developed by the researcher, was administered to 14 voluntarily childfree couples (14 males and 14 females) who had been married for five or more years; had made a permanent, voluntary decision to remain childfree (although biologically capable of having children); and had never reared children.

This study supports many of the findings of previous research, however, this was not always the case. While causal conclusions could not be drawn, the results of this study seem to indicate a growing acceptance of the childfree alternative to a family lifestyle, and an equality between men and women in their decision for and commitment to the childfree choice.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Childfree Alternative

Couples are making the choice to remain childfree with increasing frequency. For example, Grindstaff projected that by the year 2001, 20% of married women in Canada between the ages of 30-34 will never have borne a child (cited in Veevers, 1979). According to Veevers, "since the 1960's, studies of the incidence of childlessness confirm that childlessness has increased, especially among young wives" (1980, p.156). And Pol's study concluded that, "while the intention for zero children is one that most retain, the intention to have children is subject to change" (1983, p. 327). For both economic and cultural reasons, the increase in frequency of the childfree choice, as well as information and research of fertility decision-making and intentional childlessness, is vital.

The study of childlessness received little scholarly attention until the mid-1970's (Krishnan, 1989) and there is a paucity of current research literature which examines both wives' and husbands' views on the childfree choice, and wherein voluntarily childfree couples are identified. Furthermore, while the choice to remain childfree is increasing in frequency, it continues to be perceived by some as deviant behavior. Research in this area has many methodological problems, such as the inclusion of involuntary childless couples with voluntarily childless couples, and the exclusion of husbands in much of the previous research. For example, while Canadian sociologist Jean Veevers has conducted many studies of childlessness in Canada, this research concentrated largely on wives (Krishnan, 1989; Rowland, 1982; Veevers, 1979). In Veevers' six year Canadian study of childless persons, 120 childless wives and only 36 childless husbands were interviewed. That the literature on childlessness provided few accounts of the husband's role in remaining childfree lends "support to the belief that 'childlessness' only affects the woman, and that she is essentially responsible for the decision" (Rowland, p. 18). Veevers described, in *Childless by choice*, a phenomenon she entitled the "parenthood 'prescription'" (1980, p. 5). Generally, this term describes societal norms which set out, first, that married persons follow the course of marriage followed by parenthood, and second, that parenthood may be considered the answer to a number of personal problems. "Parenthood is believed to provide experiences which are crucial to the development of full emotional and sexual maturity ... to give life purpose and meaning and, especially for women, to be necessary if not sufficient for fulfillment" (Veevers, 1980, p. 6).

Perhaps the reason that much of the previous research has concentrated on wives is that parenthood has been viewed largely as more important for women than for men. While traditionally, men may have gained a sense of masculinity, fulfillment and success through their careers and/or sexual prowess, most women were limited in establishing their femininity and finding fulfillment in the childbearing and childrearing arenas (Veevers, 1980). However, "the rise of feminism and increased opportunities for women" brought not only the opportunity for women to find fulfillment in areas other than childrearing, but for men to become involved in this arena, and for both men and women to consider and exercise freedom of choice about a subject neither had traditionally been in the habit of thinking about: the having or not having of children (Nason & Poloma, 1976, p. 7).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the following aspects of the childfree lifestyle:

I. A profile of the childfree couple

II. Reasons for making the childfree choice

III. How the choice to remain childfree is made

IV. Criticisms, disadvantages and regrets of the childfree choice

V. Indication of commitment to remaining childfree

These five areas formed the basis of the research instrument, a survey, which was designed in order that the childfree alternative to a family lifestyle could be described.

This study is descriptive in design, and was therefore "primarily concerned with finding out 'what is'" (Borg and Gall, 1983, p. 331). Specifically, the study examined voluntarily childless couples who had been married for five years or longer; had made a permanent, voluntary decision to remain childfree; had never reared children; and were both willing to complete the survey. Survey responses were compared both within couple dyads and between gender groups in order to describe the childfree alternative to a family lifestyle.

Overview of the Thesis

Following Chapter I, an introductory chapter, Chapter II contains a literature review which provides background information on each of the five objectives forming the basis of this study. In Chapter III, the research design and methodology are presented and the development of the research instrument and procedures for data collection are described. The generalizability and limitations of the study are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter IV contains the research findings and results, followed by a discussion and summary of the findings and results in Chapter V.

Definition of Terms

Terms used in this study are defined as follows:

Childfree - this term is used to indicate that a choice to remain childfree has been exercised (Rowland, 1982).

Childless - although this term is sometimes used to indicate that there is something lacking or amiss (hence the "less"), the terms childless and childfree are used interchangeably.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Profile of the Childfree Couple

Most research findings (Feldman, 1981; Heller, Tsai, & Chalfant, 1986; Krishnan, 1989; Pol, 1983; Rowland, 1982; Wilson, 1986) correspond with Veevers' (1979) summary of the characteristics of voluntary childfree couples: such couples tend to live in urban areas and marry (for the first time) at a late age. For example, childfree couples in Krishnan's (1989) study tended to have been married about two years later than couples with children, and in Veevers' (1980) study, the mean age at first marriage for voluntarily childless couples was almost five years later than that of the reference population. Veevers noted that, "A number of researchers have observed that high rates of childlessness tend to be associated with relatively late age at first marriage" but adds that while this correlation is no doubt due in part to subfecundity, it may be largely due to the similar factors that result in delaying marriage, which predispose men and women to "delay, and ultimately forego, parenthood" as well (1980, p. 183).

Another finding of previous research is that most voluntarily childless couples are college educated, with both husband and wife in high income positions. Veevers (1980) reported that other researchers have found that the likelihood of childlessness increases with number of years of schooling, especially for women who have had four or more years of college education. Parallel to this is research which indicates that women who are employed have higher rates of childlessness than those who are not (pp. 185-186). Since childless women are more likely to work out of the home than mothers, they tend to work more continuously, and to be career oriented. These factors often work together toward greater success and higher income. Even when mothers work, much of their salary is designated to pay for childcare and household help, leaving little left over for optional spending, while childless women often have a greater amount of disposable income. This in itself may work in favor of remaining childfree.

Veevers (1979) also noted that many studies of childless couples found that a large number have no religious affiliation, however, not all studies support this. For instance, in Wilson's (1986) study of childfree couples, only 15% of the sample had no religious affiliation, and in Krishnan's Canadian study of the effects of religious factors on childlessness, more than 50% of the voluntarily childfree couples were Catholic. Krishnan (1989) found that, contrary to previous studies which showed that Catholics were less likely to be voluntarily childfree than non-Catholics, "Catholics tend to be more likely than non-Catholics to have no children at all" (p. 18). The shift in religiosity among childless couples in more recent research may, in part, be due to some moderation of the traditional view, in which, for example, Roman Catholicism saw the sole purpose of sexual intercourse as being to procreate (Burgwyn, 1981). Further research in and attention to this area seems indicated.

With regard to age at first marriage, Pol (1983) indicated that women who marry at a later age are more likely not to have children. Similarly, Veevers (1979) stated that while mothers over 30 may continue to have children, women who postpone motherhood until age 30 are unlikely to have children. Pol concluded that, while the intention not to have children is fairly stable, the intention to have children is likely to change. This change of intention from more than zero to zero children is associated with many of the same factors

Veevers (1979, 1980) listed as common to childfree couples: higher education, higher income, employment, and less importance placed on religion.

With regard to employment, Veevers (1979) found a direct correlation between childlessness and education for women, especially for those with four or more years of college. This is concurrent with Krishnan's (1989) finding that the higher the wife's wage, the greater the likelihood of childlessness. Feldman (1981) found that the employment levels of voluntarily childfree women were much closer to those of their husbands than women with children. As Veevers (1980) noted, "Although it is, of course, possible for mothers to achieve high levels of education, it is clear that motherhood leads to attrition at every stage of the educational process" (p. 186). It would appear that for women with high occupational status (often due to high levels of education), motherhood and career don't mix.

Another interesting finding reported by several researchers (Rowland, 1982; Veevers, 1979, 1980; Wilson, 1986) with regard to education was that in all categories of education (i.e., secondary, post-secondary, graduate school, etc.), childfree women had higher levels of education than corresponding childfree men. (The only exception to this was in Veevers' [1980] research study in which 28 of the childless husbands compared to 21 of the childless wives had obtained an undergraduate degree.) The concept of hypogamy (i.e., marriage of a person to someone whose status is lower in some respect than their own) raises an interesting hypothesis: perhaps marriages in which male hypogamy occurs are more likely to include children, and marriages in which female hypogamy occurs are less, or not likely, to include children. This is yet another area in which further research is needed.

In summary, then, profiles of voluntarily childfree couples tend to show:

- high levels of education, especially for wives
- high levels of income for both husband and wife
- high occupational status for both husband and wife
- late age at first marriage
- low rates of religious affiliation
- residence in urban areas

Reasons for Choosing a Childfree Lifestyle

In a society frequently touted as pro-natalist (Krishnan, 1989; Rowland, 1982; Veevers, 1979, 1980), researchers have attempted to discover reasons for the childfree choice, especially in view of the fact that such behavior, when one considers not only religious influences, but "the philosophic view that parenthood is the only normal outcome of adulthood: the ultimate affirmation of life itself" (Burgwyn, 1981, p. 2) has been considered deviant (Heller et al., 1986; Veevers, 1979, 1980). As Veevers aptly noted, "childless persons typically resent being asked to explain their decision at all. It seems basically unfair that couples who opt to have children are never required to justify either their right to this alternative or their preference for it" (1980, p. 136). Veevers listed six motives for "avoiding parenthood" in her 1979 review (p. 14). This information was gleaned from indepth interviews with childless persons (mostly wives) and included the following reasons for the childfree choice:

i) the perception that undesirable things happen to people because they have children

ii) exaggeration of the parenting task as extremely demanding

iii) fear of pregnancy and childbirth (for instance, in describing childbearing respondents of Veevers' 1980 study used such adjectives as "sickening, repulsive, and disgusting" [p. 44])

iv) doubt of personal competence in child care

v) previous prolonged contact with unsavory children

These first five reasons can perhaps best be understood when one considers the "parenthood mystique" in our society, which Veevers (1980) explained as the twofold belief, "first, that children are compatible with self-fulfillment; and second, that children are indeed necessary for complete self-fulfillment" (p. 41). Veevers suggested that one reason for choosing a childfree lifestyle may be as a result of early experiences in which the parenthood mystique was destroyed or discredited. Indeed, Burgwyn (1981, p. 40) noted that "Researchers have determined that childhood unhappiness is a potent factor in the decision to be a nonparent." When respondents in Veevers' study were asked how they envisioned their mother's life had she remained childless

> these respondents perceived that the advent of children altered their parents' lives in important, negative, and irrevocable ways. Critical to this perception is not only the observation that undesirable things have happened to some parents, but the corollary that undesirable things happened to those people because they had children rather than for other reasons. (1980, p. 64)

Veevers also found that respondents tended to view parenthood as a dichotomous choice - having children was something that was done at the expense, or instead, of other things. For instance, one could choose motherhood *or* a career, being a mother *or* being a competent woman, parenting *or* being debt free, parenting *or* happiness, etc. "Among childless couples, the phrasing of childbearing decisions in dichotomous terms is closely associated with the desire to have whatever decisions one makes reversible ... The perception of freedom is a central focus of the childfree lifestyle" (Veevers, 1980, p. 67).

In Burgwyn's (1981) research of childfree couples, the word heard most often when couples described reasons for voluntary childlessness was *freedom*: freedom to travel, to pursue a career, to be spontaneous, to indulge in hobbies - "the voluntarily childless desire freedom from the lifetime responsibility, the full-time occupation, that children entail" (p. 29). Freedom for some of the respondents in Veevers' 1980 study meant not only the freedom to pursue a career for women, but the freedom not to pursue a career in some of the men's cases. Therefore, some childless men were not only free not to work for the sake of their children, but did not generally have to work for the sake of their wives either. While many childfree men and women continue to work at career goals, what seems to be as important as utilizing one's freedom is having a sense of it. As Veevers noted, for childless couples, "Options may not be exercised much but their existence is crucial" (cited in Burgwyn, 1981, p. 29).

Another reason for choosing to remain childless may be tied in to birth order variables. "Several studies indicate that there is a statistically large number of only children and eldest children among the voluntarily childless" (Burgwyn, p. 37). Only children may experience doubt about their personal competence in child care. Veevers' 1980 study contained an unusually high number of firstborn persons, among which a large proportion were also only children who expressed doubt in their ability to care for children (p. 60). For eldest children in a family, the reverse may be true. Often saddled with and competent in the responsibilities of babysitting or even childrearing, they have few illusions left about the "drudgery" of childcare (Burgwyn, p. 37).

The sixth motive Veevers found for "avoiding parenthood" in her 1979 work was that:

> vi) involvement in an adult-centered lifestyle (including a preoccupation with freedom, value of spontaneity, indulging in minor vices, and a less traditional outlook) was associated with childlessness (p. 16)

Subsequent research, however, supports (in part) Veevers sixth motive for the childfree choice. That Veevers' first five motives have not been supported may be as a result of efforts in more recent studies to include both men and women. (In Rowland's 1982 study, for example, respondents included 183 men and 191 women.) However, many other reasons for making the childfree choice have been found by researchers. For example, in her study of the childfree lifestyle in New Zealand, Rowland found that women and men gave similar reasons for their decision to remain childfree. Among these were the long-term commitment required in parenting, greater personal freedom allowed in the childfree lifestyle, and greater time for self and partner. For women but not men, reasons of career disadvantages, disinterest in parenting, and greater intimacy with partner were also given. Reasons rated as unimportant or not applicable for both women and men in Rowland's study were dislike of children (in Veevers' 1980 study, most of the respondents reported a relative disinterest in children and in some cases, an active dislike [p. 61]), perception of mother/fatherhood roles as negative or undesirable, overpopulation, fear of not liking the child, and fear of having a deformed child.

In Wilson's 1986 study, respondents were also asked to list the advantages of a childfree lifestyle. For these older couples, the advantages of being childfree included: i) greater freedom and flexibility, ii) financial and occupational advantages, iii) better relationships with spouse and family members, iv) fewer worries and less responsibilities, and v) greater mobility and independence. It is difficult to say whether the stated advantages of a childfree life were similar to the reasons for making such a choice in the first place for these elderly childfree couples, as Wilson's study did not distinguish between intentionally and unintentionally childless couples.

Perhaps one of the most influential factors in deciding to remain childfree was discussed by Burgwyn (1981), who found, as did other researchers (i.e., Rowland, 1982; Veevers, 1980; Wilson, 1986), that an important reason for choosing to remain childfree, especially for women, is to preserve and nurture the special one-to-one relationship they have with their spouses. "What often develops among the childless is a marriage characterized by intimacy, dependency on, and even preoccupation with the other" (p. 34). Nason and Poloma, reflecting on the adult-centered lifestyle of voluntarily childless couples, noted that almost exclusively, couples in their study preferred to spend time in each other's company rather than going out with others or spending time alone. These researchers noted Veevers proposition that for childless couples in an intense dyadic relationship, the inclusion of a third member (i.e., a child) would be disruptive and undesirable. Certainly, when the presence of children is viewed as detrimental to the satisfaction and intimacy of a marital relationship, a strong motive for remaining childfree is found. It would follow, then, that "As long as the childfree lifestyle is rewarding, there appear to be serious hesitations about introducing any change in the marriage" (Nason & Poloma, p. 20). Veevers (1980) noted, with some element of surprise, that "as far as we could determine, some successful childless marriages are rewarding not *in spite* of not having children, but *because* of not having them. At least for some, the intensity associated with remaining childless appears to maximize the potential for the man-woman relationship" (p. 94).

How the Decision to Remain Childfree Is Made

How do couples (or in some cases, individuals) come to a decision to remain childfree? In Veevers' (1980) study, two distinct patterns became clear. In the first, the couple came to a decision to remain childfree and explicitly stated their wishes in the form of a verbal "contract" prior to marriage. Such persons often had made the decision to remain childfree in their early adolescent years, perhaps long before marriage had even been considered, and generally sought a mate who would agree to such a condition of marriage. Of Veevers' sample, more than one-third entered marriage in this way. (Likewise, in Rowland's sample, about one-third had made the decision to remain childfree before their relationship began.) Interestingly, Veevers found that of these "early articulators" (a term coined by Houseknecht), only a few were males who had made the decision as boys never to become fathers. Rather, male respondents tended to equate the childfree decision with the decision to marry a particular woman. They did not feel strongly about having children, or did not feel strongly before marriage. Veevers notes, "This is consistent with findings from a variety of studies regarding fertility decision-making among males: they don't think about it" (1980, pp. 19-20).

Nason and Poloma, in addressing this issue, found that wives appeared to be more likely to remain desirous of childlessness both in their present marriages and in future situations as well, while husbands appeared to be less personally committed to such a decision. For them, the childfree decision in the present marriage would not necessarily carry over to another relationship. Since the brunt of childrearing responsibilities rests upon women, they tend to have greater say in the childfree decision, while husbands are willing to support their wives should they desire to remain childfree. Nason and Poloma's study showed similar results to those of Veevers'. Of the respondents (30 voluntarily childfree couples), only four made the decision not to have children before marriage, and in each case it was the woman who initiated the decision. Twelve couples made a gradual decision not to parent two to three years after marriage, and the remaining 14 couples made the decision after more than three years of marriage. "The decision in these cases was as a result of a continued postponement of childbearing until some vague future point in time" (Nason & Poloma, p. 35).

The second pattern Veevers noted in the decision to remain childfree is the tendency for couples to postpone children until such time childbearing is no longer considered desirable (or is indeed no longer possible). More than two-thirds of Veevers' 1980 sample comprised such a group.

Veevers described four stages through which couples move from wanting to not wanting children. In the first stage of this "postponement route," the couple are committed to having children, but are waiting, for a variety of reasons (such as saving for a house, graduating from school, travelling, etc.), until the time is right. Veevers noted that if such couples effectively and continuously practice birth control, "habit and inertia tend to make them continue in the same behavior" (1980, p. 21) and they are already dissimilar to other "conventional" couples who do not attempt to control their fertility until after they have had at least one child.

The second stage revolves around shifting the postponement of children from a specific time to an indefinite time. Reasons for continued postponement ostensibly tend to be those that will eventually be advantageous to the children, such as the couple's desire to wait until they "feel more ready," or until they can better afford children (p. 22). In stage three couples may, for the first time, openly acknowledge the possibility that they may remain permanently childless. However, "the only definite decision is to postpone deciding until some vague and unspecified time in the future" (p. 23). Yet, according to Veevers, the very act of openly deliberating the pros and cons of parenthood probably increases the likelihood of remaining childless. Apparently, most couples never question the inevitability of parenthood, or simply idealize it. "A significant step in the moral career of childlessness is simply questioning the inevitability of parenthood and considering negative as well as positive aspects" (Veevers, 1980, p. 25).

Stage four in Veevers' model of postponement constitutes the conclusion by the couple that their childless state is a permanent one. The couple becomes aware of the implicit decision to remain childless, however, the direct decision to avoid children is almost never made.

Contrary to Veevers' model, studies in which only a small portion of respondents postpone the decision to have children until it is too late are not uncommon. For example, in Rowland's (1982) study of intentionally childless couples, two-thirds of the respondents made their decision soon or some time after the relationship began; only five percent of the sample stated that their decision was made because it was left too late to have children.

Criticisms, Disadvantages and Regrets of the Childfree Lifestyle

In a society which is so typically and frequently described as pronatalist, that those who choose to remain childless are sometimes criticized, both overtly and covertly, is not surprising. As Veevers noted, "An ubiquitous manifestation of pronatalist pressure is the expectation that childless persons provide acceptable accounts of their behavior" (1980, p. 135). Nonetheless, marriages which are childless by choice are becoming more acceptable. For example, Nason and Poloma (1976) found that the intentionally childless couples in their study "did not experience or perceive enough societal pressure to force them to lie or circumvent the question" when asked about their childless state (p. 34).

Burgwyn (1981) noted that "reactions to voluntary childlessness can be highly critical and even hostile" (p. 59). The most common criticism directed at the voluntarily childless is that of selfishness. That this criticism lacks any inherent logic whatsoever is best stated by a 34 year old male respondent in Burgwyn's study, who speculated that people who believe that voluntarily childless people are selfish are those who also believe that having children is a sacrifice, and who are not happy themselves.

> I don't think those who are happy about having children would ever think to call anyone selfish for not having them. Would I call you selfish if you don't have a piano? It's up to you. I enjoy having a piano. I don't consider it a sacrifice to have the thing around here. (p. 60)

Burgwyn noted that a second criticism of couples who remain childless is that of loneliness in old age. Yet, there is no guarantee that parents will be anyless lonely in old age. In Wilson's (1986) study of older childless couples (in which both voluntary and involuntary childless couples participated), responses to the question "what do you feel was the worst part about not having children?" were broken down as follows: 47.5% of respondents did not identify or specify a "worst part," 20% of the responses contained a theme of "a sense of non-continuance," while only 12.5% of the responses expressed a "sense of aloneness" (p. 51).

When respondents of Rowland's (1982) study were asked about the disadvantages of remaining childfree, 43% of respondents felt there were no disadvantages of their choice. Fifteen percent said they were uncertain of the disadvantages, and 42% said there were disadvantages of remaining childfree. Of these, four main disadvantages were expressed: first, the lack of family life for the couple; second, the social isolation these couples felt as a non-family unit; third, loss of the positive aspects of childrearing; and fourth, the "social pressure" and "jealousy" encountered (pp. 24-25). When Rowland's subjects were asked if they had regrets about their choice to remain childfree, 80% of the men and 73% of the women did not. Eleven percent of the men and 19% of the women were uncertain - seven percent of men and women still had regrets. Of this latter group, all but two percent had come to terms with their regrets.

Why are couples who are childless by choice sometimes viewed with such disfavor? Veevers described three models from which the negative meaning associated with voluntary childlessness derive (1980, pp. 8-11). The first is the diagnostic model, in which the lack of desire to have children is seen to evidence psychological maladjustment. Proponents of such a model make reference to a "parenthood instinct." It follows, then, that "If wanting children is 'natural' then ... not wanting them is 'unnatural'" (p. 10). The absence of such a "parenthood instinct" indicates serious pathology.

The second model is based on the premise that those who remain childless are deprived of the crucial developmental tasks of childbearing and childrearing, which are vital for good mental health. This model is best described in *Reader's Digest* (1975): "The value of marriage is not that adults produce children, but that children produce adults," and is fittingly termed the deprivation model (cited in Veevers, 1980, p. 11).

The third model, the labelling model, assumes that once voluntarily childless couples "are labelled as undesirable and treated accordingly, their response to such sanctions does in fact lead to undesirable characteristics" (Veevers, 1980, p. 11). Following this method of reasoning, one would expect that those who parent, and are therefore labelled as desirable and treated accordingly, develop desirable characteristics, whether or not such characteristics were present to begin with.

Commitment to Remaining Childless

It would seem that the levels of commitment to remaining childless are as varied as are levels of commitment to parenting. However, in view of the fact that remaining childfree requires diligent proactive planning, the question of commitment to such an alternate family lifestyle arises: *Are* all voluntarily childless couples equally committed to remaining childfree?

In Nason and Poloma's (1976) study of voluntary childless couples, "One of the clearest issues to emerge from the data was the fact that not all 30 couples were equally committed to remaining childless" (p. 22). These researchers found that four typologies emerged. The first category, that of the irrevocably committed, represented those couples (n=5) of whom one or both had been sterilized; thus, their decision not to parent was irrevocable in the present partnership. Of these five couples, only one had reached the decision to remain childfree prior to marriage - the remaining four couples came to a gradual decision after marriage.

Category two included the strongly committed (n=8), in that these couples used effective contraception (i.e., the birth control pill), discussed sterilization without expressing fear of the irrevocability of the procedure, both believed they would rather that the wife have an abortion than bear a child, and expressed no ambivalence in their decision to remain childfree (p. 26). It is interesting to note, in view of previous findings, that "In all eight of these cases it was the wife who was strongly committed to not having children, and the husband was supportive of this decision for that particular relationship ... In another relationship, these men may have become fathers" (Nason & Paloma, p. 27).

Category three, the reasonably committed, comprised those couples (n=12) who either expressed concern about what they would do in the event of contraceptive failure or expressed some doubt about the permanence of their decision to be non-parents. These couples, who were not morally opposed to abortion and effectively used contraceptives, had not focused their "plans and visions" as strongly as couples in category two (p. 29).

Couples in category four (n=5) were separated from the "reasonably committed" on the issue of abortion. In the event of an unwanted pregnancy, most of these couples claimed that they would go through with it and adjust to parenthood. The couples in category four - the committed with reservations - were also uncertain as to whether they might, at some time, change their minds and plan for a family - a drastic change of mind which was given little, if any, serious discussion in the other three categories (p. 30).

Veevers also explored commitment to childlessness in her 1980 study. While the degree of commitment also varied among her respondents, those who were "early articulators" (i.e., those who knew prior to marriage, and decided independent of their partners attitudes, that they would remain childless) tended "to be in favor of sterilization and to seek it at an early age" (p. 29). Conversely, more than half of the respondents in Veevers' study were committed to their spouse's wishes rather than their own in remaining childless, in that they felt that such a decision was indicative of their present marriage rather than being an unchanging characteristic of themselves. "Such persons feel that not wanting children reflects not their own nature *per se* so much as the situation in which they find themselves" (1980, p. 30).

Commitment to a childfree lifestyle is, in many ways, as difficult to measure as is, for example, commitment to being a "good" parent. While establishing that a couple's method of contraception is foolproof (i.e., sterilization) is one method of measuring strength of commitment to a childfree lifestyle, as Veevers noted, "it cannot necessarily be assumed that the sterilized are more committed than other persons ... conversely, some persons who decline to be sterilized are instead willing to rely on abortion should the need arise" (1979, p. 17). And, while Veevers' research defines the voluntarily childless as having reached their decision either independently, prior to marriage, or (for the majority) having remained childless as a result of continued postponement, other researchers have not always found a similar pattern (see previous discussion of Rowland's study in which only five percent of respondents were childfree as a result of having delayed their decision until it was too late to have children).

Summary

Current available research literature examining the childfree alternative to a family lifestyle has been discussed. On the whole, it appears that the voluntarily childfree marry at a late age for the first time, have high educational levels (this appears to be particularly true for women), live in urban rather than rural areas, and have high occupational status. These couples tend to value an intimate and special relationship with their spouses and enjoy an adult-centered lifestyle and the freedom it can bring. A large number of voluntarily childfree persons tend to be only or first-born children, and may have low levels of religiosity. Although many voluntarily childless couples seem to simply question the automatic assumption that all married couples will have children and make a conscious decision against parenting, the range of commitment to remaining childfree varies.

CHAPTER III

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This is a descriptive study, the overall purpose of which was to examine the childfree alternative to a family lifestyle. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine the reasons for making the childfree choice; how the decision to remain childfree is made by both men and women; criticisms, disadvantages and regrets of this alternative lifestyle; the commitment to remaining childless, and attempts, through biographical data, to construct a profile of the childfree couple.

A questionnaire, developed specifically for this study, was administered to respondents by the researcher at the University of Alberta or in respondents' homes, or was mailed to those respondents who could not come to the University of Alberta or with whom the researcher could not meet.

Responses were examined both within couple dyads and between gender groups, and were compared with the findings of previous studies of childless couples in order that the childfree alternative to a family lifestyle could be described.

Sample

A convenience sample of 14 couples (14 males and 14 females) participated in this study. All subjects met the following criteria:

- had been married to each other for five years or longer
- had made a decision not to have children and intended to remain childfree although biologically capable of having children

- had never reared children
- both husband and wife were willing to participate in the study

Voluntarily childfree couples were recruited through a media-psychology radio program, and notices in the *Edmonton Journal*, *Folio* (a University of Alberta publication), adult-only living complexes and Government of Alberta business offices.

Research Instrument

The research instrument developed for this study (Appendix H) was based in part on the content of Rowland's (1982) exploratory study of voluntarily childless couples, on Nason and Poloma's (1976) study of commitment to remaining childfree, on Wilson's (1986) study of elderly childless couples, and on an indepth literature review of childlessness.

The literature review provided the researcher with information about the relationships found in previous studies between various variables and voluntary childlessness. From this information, survey questions were formulated. This factor is of importance when a new research instrument is developed for use in a study. Since previous studies of childfree couples have made predictions about this group, construct validity is increased to the extent that these predictions are confirmed. Therefore, in an attempt to establish construct validity to the greatest possible extent, "a new measure is tested against those variables ... where everyone will agree that relationships would be expected" (Nunnally, 1972, p. 32).

The objectives of this study are to describe biographical information; how the childfree choice is made; reasons for choosing to remain childfree;

criticisms, disadvantages and regrets of the childfree lifestyle; and commitment to remaining childfree.

Section I (questions 1-19) deals with gathering biographical information in order that a profile *per se* of voluntarily childfree couples may be constructed.

The purpose of Section II (questions 20-25) is to determine how the decision to remain childfree is made. For example, question 19, in part, attempts to determine what proportion of the sample in this study are early articulators (i.e., those who made the decision to remain childfree in their early adolescent years). Is this proportion similar to that of other studies? Do early articulators indeed consist mostly of females, thus supporting previous findings that there are few males who make the decision as boys never to become fathers?

Section III (question 26) is devoted to exploring the third objective of this study, namely, to determine reasons for choosing a childfree lifestyle. Each of the 30 responses listed therein derive from previous research of the childfree lifestyle and studies of voluntarily childfree couples, and can be generally classified into four areas: intimacy and relationship concerns (responses 1-3), financial concerns (responses 4-8), freedom issues (responses 9-16), global concerns (responses 17-19), and personal concerns (responses 20-30).

Section IV (questions 27-36) explores criticisms, disadvantages and regrets of the childfree choice, with an emphasis on the latter two categories. This section also provides childless couples with the opportunity to describe possible advantages of the childfree lifestyle - hence question 29. And, in response to the often unspoken, yet seemingly ubiquitous belief that voluntarily childfree persons dislike children and avoid contact with them, questions 26 and 27 explore this criticism.

The purpose of Section V (questions 37-43) is to examine commitment to remaining childfree - the fifth objective of this study. Questions in this section evolved mainly from Nason and Poloma's (1976) study of voluntarily childless couples wherein four levels of commitment to remaining childfree were identified. Since the difference between these four categories comprised mainly issues of the effectiveness of contraceptive measures employed by childless couples, the course of action they would likely choose in the event of contraceptive failure, and degree of certainty of the permanence of their decision to remain childfree, questions in the fifth section of the survey focused on attempting to explore these areas of commitment to remaining childless.

Once questions for each section, or objective, of the study had been formulated, the survey was reviewed for validity and reliability by research and measurement experts, by a voluntarily childless couple with expertise in the development of survey instruments, and by members of the University of Alberta Ethics Review Committee who examined the survey both as measurement experts and from an ethical perspective. Recommendations for changes in the wording, phraseology, answers, and/or sequence of the questions were made to ensure that content validity (the degree to which the questions matched the objectives of the study); face validity (the degree to which the survey appeared to describe what it claimed to describe); and construct validity had been included in the instrument; that the reading level was appropriate to the sample; and that the use of technical terminology had been avoided. In order to increase construct and content validity, questions were added, deleted and modified. Once this had been established to the greatest possible extent, and ethical clearance had been obtained, a pilot study was carried out.

Two couples were selected for the pilot study from couples of whom the researcher knew or had met in the course of the research. The pilot study was used to identify remaining problems in the administration of the questionnaire, such as phrasing and sequence of questions and the need for the addition or elimination of questions. The couples who participated in the pilot study did not participate in the final study, nor were their responses included in the description of the research findings.

Data Collection

All subjects who participated in this study initially contacted the researcher by telephone in response to notices in *Folio*, the *Edmonton Journal*, adult-only living complexes, Government of Alberta business offices and media-psychology radio program appeals.

The notice in *Folio* (Appendix C) appeared for one issue. *Folio* is a weekly University of Alberta publication with an on-campus circulation of 9,400 readers comprising academic and support staff. It is also available to University students and is distributed to companies associated with the University of Alberta, University of Alberta Hospital staff, all Provincial Members of the Legislative Assembly, and approximately 400 off-campus alumni and non-alumni readers. Five couples participated in this study as a result of the Folio notice.

The *Edmonton Journal* notice (Appendix D) appeared for one (Saturday) issue in the classified "notices" section of the *Journal*, a newspaper with a Saturday readership of approximately 320,000 in the City of Edmonton and adjacent counties. The *Journal* has a well balanced male/female readership, the core of which are between the ages of 25 and 65. Approximately 60% of readers have post-secondary or graduate education and approximately 80-85% read the *Edmonton Journal* on a page-by-page basis (NADbank '90). No participants were recruited as a result of this notice.

Radio appeals were made on a media-psychology program entitled *"That's Living,"* which offers practical advice to listeners on all topics of personal concern. The program, which commenced in 1982 and airs on CJCA AM radio weekdays between the hours of 2:05 and 3:30 p.m., is hosted by Dr. J. G. Paterson, Psychologist (who served as thesis supervisor for this study); Dr. H. L. Janzen, Psychologist; and Dr. C. Blashko, Psychiatrist. The target audience of the program is the 25 to 54 year age group and approximately 6,000 City of Edmonton residents in this age range are reached daily. The total number of *"That's Living"* listeners aged seven years and older in the full-coverage signal area (i.e., the City of Edmonton and surrounding areas) is approximately 23,000.

The majority of respondents were recruited through this medium - seven couples participated in this research study as a result of the *"That's Living"* program appeals.

Notices were also distributed by the researcher to six adult-only living complexes in both south and north Edmonton neighborhoods, and to two Government of Alberta business offices located in downtown Edmonton (Appendix B). One couple participated in this study as a result of the posted notices. Finally, three childless couples were invited to take part in the study by the researcher, of which one couple participated.

At the time of the initial telephone contact with the researcher, all respondents were given the following information about the study (Appendix E):

- the study was of voluntarily childless couples and focused on areas such as how the decision was made, reasons for making the childfree choice, and consequences of this alternative lifestyle
- the anonymity of responses was assured as names were not requested on the survey
- the information gathered would be used for research purposes only
- the survey would take approximately 20 to 25 minutes to complete

All respondents were thanked for contacting the researcher and were told that their participation in the study would be invaluable to research of voluntarily childless couples.

Initially, all respondents were asked to meet with the researcher at the University of Alberta in order to complete the survey. However, as some respondents were unable to do so for reasons such as blindness, out of town residence, poor health, or limited ability to travel within the city due to advanced age, the survey was also administered by the researcher in the home of one couple, and eight couples received mailed surveys, of which seven were completed and returned.

All subjects received a disclaimer (Appendix G), which they signed and returned to the investigator. As subjects had been assured of the anonymity of their responses, all disclaimers were separated from the surveys and have been retained in a separate file. Respondents who received mailed copies of the survey also received an accompanying letter (Appendix F) which explained the study and provided instructions to them. These respondents were also advised that the researcher would destroy any record of their names and addresses once their surveys had been received or the researcher had received notice that they did not wish to participate in the study after all.

Each subject was given a survey to complete. Respondents were asked to work independently of their spouses and not to discuss the questionnaire until it had been completed and returned to the researcher. To ensure that the data collected was kept strictly confidential, each pair of questionnaires were assigned a number, followed by an "m" (male) or an "f" (female) to indicate couple groupings and the sex of the respondent. A separate log was kept containing only the code numbers of couple groupings. When completed questionnaires were returned, checkmarks were made beside the appropriate code number in the log. At the completion of the study, the log containing the number codes and corresponding checkmarks indicating receipt of completed questionnaires was kept on file.

Respondents were informed of the confidentiality of the study, and that the information they provided would be anonymous and was intended for research purposes only. It was stressed that participation in the study was voluntary, and that respondents were free to withdraw from the study at any time without incurring ill will.

Data Analysis

This is a descriptive study in which data were examined for frequency, percentages, and patterns. Responses to survey questions were compared both within couple dyads and between gender groups. Where applicable, percentages for both males and females were reported.

Delimitations

In order that the childfree alternative to a family lifestyle be described, it was decided that the sample for this study consist of couples who had been married for a minimum of five years, had made a permanent, voluntary decision to remain childfree; had never reared children; and in which both husband and wife were willing to complete the survey.

Initially, all respondents were asked to meet with the researcher at the University of Alberta in order to complete surveys. It was later decided that surveys would be mailed to respondents who were unable (or unwilling) to comply with this request, or that the researcher would meet with couples in their homes for this purpose.

This study was intended as descriptive rather than correlational or causal-comparative research.

Limitations

Although two methodological problems frequently found in the research on childless couples - the exclusion of husbands from much of the research on childless "couples" and the inclusion of both involuntarily and voluntarily childless couples - were avoided, other methodological problems, such as small sample size and self-selected sample could not be avoided. Specifically, a limitation of this study is the use of volunteer subjects. Rosenthal and Rosnow have found that "volunteer subjects tend to be better educated and come from a higher social class than those who do not volunteer" (cited in Travers, 1978, p. 276). Therefore, while the methods of recruiting childless couples for this study attempted to be conducive to obtaining a heterogeneous sample, respondents cannot be considered to be a representative sample.

Another limitation of this study is the exclusion of voluntarily childfree couples who have either been married for less than five years, or who are unmarried from the sample. As well, all respondents came from the City of

Edmonton and surrounding areas only. A further limitation is the differing methods of administering the questionnaire. Although respondents were cautioned not to consult with their spouses while completing the survey, there is no assurance that couples did not collaborate with each other, thereby changing the nature of their responses. However, as Feldman (1981) noted, in studies not testing for sex differences, such collaboration does not necessarily invalidate the results.

A final factor is the limitation of self-reporting instruments, in which subjects may not report true feelings, attitudes, perceptions or facts in favor of more socially desirable responses.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Profile of the Childfree Couple

The mean age of the total sample (males and females) was 41.5 years, with ages ranging from 26 to 82 years. The female sample was slightly younger than the male sample, with mean ages of 40.8 years and 42.1 years respectively.

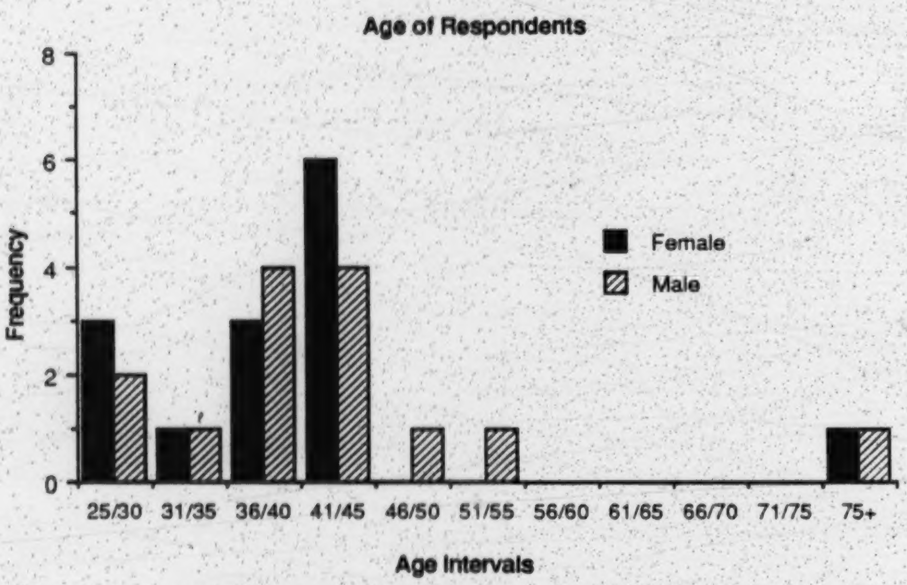

Figure 1. Age of Respondents by Gender

Age is an important factor in research of the childfree alternative to a family lifestyle. For example, while newly married (and often younger) couples may be occupied with beginning many things (i.e., launching careers, setting up a home together, travelling together for the first time, etc.), older couples may be at a time in their lives when they are stepping back to examine their personal satisfaction with life choices (i.e., childlessness) to date. In the present study, the variety in age of the sample provided an excellent range in the data as a result of the various life experiences from which respondents were able to draw in order to answer many of the questions asked (such as disadvantages, advantages and regrets of the childfree choice).

As indicated in Figure 2, length of marriage for the 14 voluntarily childfree couples in the sample ranged from 5 to 37 years, with a mean of 14.3 years.

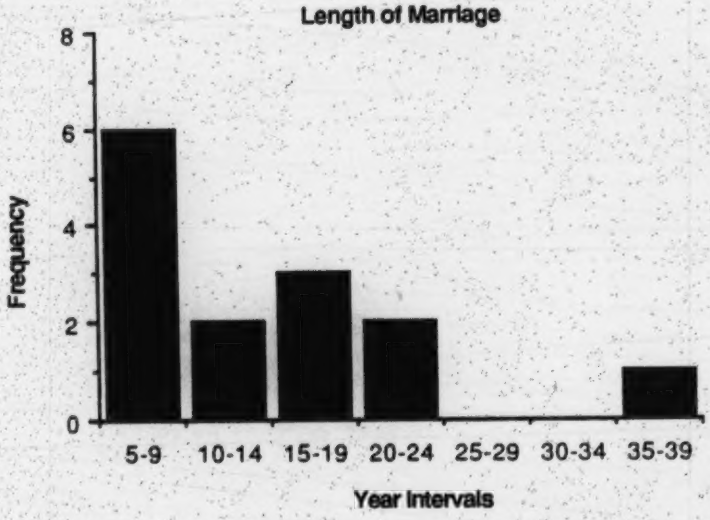

Figure 2. Length of Marriage

Age at first marriage was slightly younger for the female sample than the male sample, with age at first marriage ranging from 18 to 44 years for females and 20 to 34 years for males, and means of 25.4 years and 27 years respectively. The mean age at first marriage for the female and male sample combined was 26.2 years.

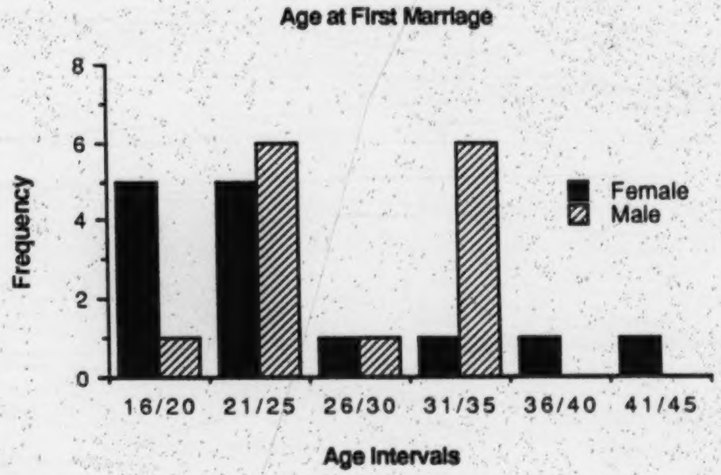

Figure 3. Age at First Marriage by Gender

Of the total sample of 14 males and 14 females, 53.6% were either only children or first-born children. The 4 only children comprised 3 females and 1 male. The 11 first-born children comprised 5 females and 6 males. Only children were not included in the first-born category.

The majority of the total sample of voluntarily childless couples resided in an urban area: 10 of the 14 couples (71.4%) were urban dwellers. The remaining 4 couples resided in rural areas. This is interesting to note in view of the fact that two of the mediums employed to recruit respondents for the study (i.e., the *Edmonton Journal* and the radio media-psychology program *"That's Living"*) reach a large number of residents in rural areas surrounding the City of Edmonton.

As shown in Table 1, a large proportion of the total sample had post-secondary education: 25 of the 28 respondents, or 89.3% fit into this category. A within couple dyad analysis revealed that for 5 couples in the sample, females had a higher level of education than their husbands, for 6 couples in the sample males had a higher level of education than their wives, and the remaining 3 couples were equally matched, both having attained the same level of education as their spouses.

Table 1

Level of Education by Gender

		Gender	
Level of Education	n	Female (%)	Male (%)
Graduate Degree	11	5 (35.7%)	6 (42.9%)
Undergraduate Degree	7	4 (28.6%)	3 (21.4%)
Some University Education	2	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)
College Diploma	3	3 (21.4%)	-
Some College Education	1	-	1 (7.1%)
Technical Inst. or Trade Training	2	-	2 (14.3%)
High school Graduate	3	2 (14.3%)	1 (7.1%)
Some High school Education	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-

Due to the fact that one member of the female sample had both a college diploma and some university education, the total number is greater than 28 and the total female percentage greater than 100.

Of the total sample, 85.7% were employed on a full-time basis (i.e., 30 hours per week or more) - this figure included 11 females and 13 males (the 14th male respondent was retired). Of the remaining 3 females in the sample, one was employed on a part-time basis (less than 30 hours per week), one was retired and one female respondent was not employed.

The approximate gross yearly income for the entire sample, including those respondents (n=3) who were retired or not employed, is shown in Table 2. It is interesting to note that of those respondents earning less than $30,000 annually (n=8), all were females. This represented over half (57.1%) of the female sample. However, the category "less than $20,000" included one retired female and one female who was not employed. The "$40,000 - $49,000" category included one retired male respondent.

Table 2

Approximate Gross Yearly Income by Gender

		Gender	
Approximate Gross Income	n	Female (%)	Male (%)
Less than $20,000	5	5 (35.8%)	-
$20,000 - $29,000	3	3 (21.4%)	-
$30,000 - $39,000	5	3 (21.4%)	2 (14.3%)
$40,000 - $49,000	11	2 (14.3%)	9 (64.3%)
$50,000 - $59,000	3	1 (7.1%)	2 (14.3%)
Over $60,000	1	-	1 (7.1%)
Total	28	14 (100%)	14 (100%)

More than one half of the total sample (57.1%) indicated that they presently had no religious preference, however, as indicated in Table 3, 96.4% of the entire sample indicated some religion in childhood.

Table 3

Religion in Childhood and Present Religious Preference

			Gender	
Religion		n	Female	Male
Protestant:	Religion in Childhood	21	11	10
	Present Preference	11	6	5
Catholic:	Religion in Childhood	3	2	1
	Present Preference	-	-	-
Jewish:	Religion in Childhood	1	1	-
	Present Preference	1	1	-
None:	Religion in Childhood	1	-	1
	Present Preference	16	7	9
Other:	Religion in Childhood	1	-	1
	Present Preference	-	-	-

One male respondent left the category "religion in childhood" blank, thereby accounting for a total of less than 14 in this category for the male sample.

A significant proportion of the total sample (71.5%) never attend a church or house of worship, or attend less than once a year. Table 4 details the frequency of attendance to a church or house of worship by gender.

Table 4

Attendance to Church/House of Worship by Frequency and Gender

		Gender	
Frequency of Attendance	n	Female	Male
Once or twice a week	3	2	1
Once or twice a month	2	1	1
Once or twice every 6 months	1	-	1
Once or twice a year	2	2	-
Less than once a year	8	4	4
Never attend	12	5	7
Other	-	-	-
Total	28	14	14

Of the total sample of 28 childless persons, 22 respondents (78.6%) indicated that they considered their relationship with their spouses to be very happy. While this group consisted of 11 each males and females, they were not mutually exclusive. That is, one member of a couple dyad may have described a very happy spousal relationship while the other member may have indicated a reasonably happy relationship. Six respondents (3 each males and females) indicated reasonably happy relationships with their spouses. None of the respondents rated their relationships as very unhappy. A within couple dyad analysis revealed that in 12 of the total sample of 14 couples (85.7%) both spouses rated their relationships as very happy (10) or reasonably happy (2).

That a significant proportion of the total sample regarded their spousal relationships as very happy was reinforced by the preference of many of the respondents to spend their leisure time alone with their spouses. Thirteen of the 14 male respondents (92.8%) indicated this preference, while 10 of the 13 female respondents who completed this question (77%) indicated a preference to spend leisure time alone with their spouses. One female respondent left this question blank. However, even if the 14th female respondent had indicated this preference, the percentage of females to males who preferred to spend leisure time alone with their spouses would have been 78.6% to 92.8% respectively.

A within couple dyad analysis revealed that 10 of the total sample of 14 couples (71.4%) were in agreement with each other in this matter: in 9 couple dyads both husbands and wives agreed that they preferred to spend their leisure time alone with their spouses, and in one couple dyad both members agreed that they preferred to spend their leisure time with their spouses and others.

Table 5

Preference of Leisure Time by Gender

		Gender	
Prefer to Spend Leisure Time	n	Female	Male
Alone with self	3	2	1
Alone with spouse	23	10	13
With spouse and others	6	4	2
With others (but not spouse)	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-

Some respondents indicated more that one preference, thus accounting for totals greater than 28 for the entire sample and 14 for each females and males.

How the Decision to Remain Childfree Is Made

The personal decision not to have children was made by many of the male and female respondents while they were in their twenties. As shown in Table 6, 5 of the 14 female respondents (35.7%) made a decision not to have children before the age of 20, while only 2 of the 14 male respondents (14.3%) made like decisions during this time in their lives.

Table 6

Personal Decision to Remain Childfree by Time of Life and Gender

		Gender	
Time of Life Decision Made	n	Female	Male
In childhood	3	2	1
In teen years (13 - 19)	4	3	1
In 20's	11	5	6
When present spouse stated opinion	3	1	2
Never (decision due to present relationship)	3	-	3
Other	4	3	1
Total	28	14	14

Included in the category "other" as indicated by 4 respondents were explanations such as: a personal decision not to have children made one or two years after marriage, the decision to remain childfree made while the respondent was in his late thirties, a personal decision made after surgery, and a decision not to have children as a result of the danger to personal health that pregnancy might bring. Six females and 5 males made the decision to remain childfree before they met their present spouses.

There was some discrepancy within couple dyads as to when the joint decision to remain childfree had been made. As indicated in Table 7, while 7 of the total 14 couples in the sample agreed upon when they had come to a joint decision not to have children, the remaining 7 couples gave discrepant responses.

Table 7

Within Couple Dyad Analysis of When Joint Decision to Remain Childless was Made

Couple Code No.	Before Marriage	In 1st year of Marriage	1-3 years after Marriage	4-6 years after Marriage	More than 6 yrs. after Marriage	Postponed until too late	Other (un-certain)
1	1M-1F						
2	2M-2M						
4	4M					4F	
5				5M-5F*			
6			6M-6F*				
7		7F*	7M*				
8	8F*			8M*			
9	9M*		9F*				
10					10M-10F*		

Table 7 Cont'd

Couple Code No.	Before Marriage	In 1st year of Marriage	1-3 years after Marriage	4-6 years after Marriage	More than 6 yrs. after Marriage	Postponed until too late	Other (un-certain)
11	11M			11F			
12				12F*			12M*
13				13M-13F*			
14	14M-14F						
15	15F*			15M*			

("M" indicates the male member of the couple, "F" indicates the female member and "*" indicates agreement within couple dyads as to who initiated the decision to remain childfree.)

For the majority of respondents (10 males and 8 females), the decision to remain childfree had been made gradually over a period of years. Twenty one respondents (11 females and 10 males) also indicated that it was their opinion that the decision to remain childfree had been mutually initiated with their spouses rather than having been initiated by one or other member of the couple. A within couple dyad analysis revealed, however, that in only 8 couple dyads both members had in fact agreed that the decision to remain childless had been a mutual one rather than having been initiated by one or other member of the couple.

Twenty of the total 28 respondents (10 each males and females) indicated that they believed they and their spouses were equally committed to remaining childfree. Six respondents (3 each males and females) indicated that they themselves were more strongly committed to this decision, and two respondents

(1 each male and female) indicated that their spouses were more strongly committed to remaining childfree than they were. However, the responses were not mutually exclusive within couple dyads. A within couple dyad analysis showed that only 10 of the total 14 couples in the sample were in agreement as to who was presently more strongly committed to remaining childfree - 8 couples agreed with one another that they were equally committed to remaining childfree and two couples agreed that their spouses were more strongly committed to the decision than they were.

Of the total sample, 57.1% (8 each males and females) stated that the decision not to have children had a positive effect on their relationship with their spouse. Three each males and females felt that this decision had no effect on their marital relationship. Only one male respondent indicated that the decision not to have children had a negative effect on his relationship with his wife, in that they had "not experienced the strengthening bond children create."

Reasons for Choosing the Childfree Lifestyle

Within the total sample of males and females, the most frequently indicated reasons that influenced respondents' individual decisions not to have children were:

- the freedom to travel (11 females, 8 males)
- greater personal freedom (10 females, 9 males)
- greater time for self (9 each females and males)
- the financial advantage of two incomes (6 females, 9 males)
- a lifestyle not consistent with childrearing (7 each females and males)
- concern for bringing a child into the world in its present state (7 each females and males)

- the importance of respondents' careers (6 females, 8 males)

Ten respondents, (5 each males and females) listed reasons in addition to those provided that had influenced their decisions not to have children. Male respondents gave reasons such as: the health of wife and self, having been fulfilled by teaching children early in marriage, the lack of a compelling need to have children, the concern of passing on childrearing cruelties that had been inflicted on him, and fear of the emotional worry over what could happen to a child due to the highly negative influences on children today.

Female respondents gave additional reasons that had influenced their decisions to remain childfree such as: health, did not think family's characteristics should be passed on, not wanting to have children they would control as their father controls them, being repulsed by childbirth, lack of a mother instinct, never being meant to have children, having been fulfilled early in marriage by teaching children, and the enjoyment of a marital relationship without children. One female respondent reported that she did not want the heartbreak of having a child on drugs or involved in crime - life was too happy to risk changing it.

Reasons provided in the questionnaire that influenced respondents' decisions not to have children are shown in Table 8 in the order of most to least frequently reported influence.

Table 8

Reasons for Making the Childfree Choice by Category, Frequency and Gender

Category	Reason	n	Gender Female	Male
Freedom Issues	Freedom to travel	19	11	8
Freedom Issues	Greater personal freedom	19	10	9
Freedom Issues	Greater time for self	18	9	9
Financial Concerns	Financ. advant. of 2 incomes	15	6	9
Financial Concerns	Importance of my career	14	6	8
Freedom Issues	Lifestyle not consistent with childrearing	14	7	7
Global Concerns	Concern for bringing child into world in its present state	14	7	7
Intimacy & Relationship Concerns	Presence of children detrimental to intimate relationship	10	6	4
Freedom Issues	Wish to limit responsibilities	10	6	4
Freedom Issues	Value spontaneity	10	6	4
Financial Concerns	Financial cost of children	9	2	7
Freedom Issues	Long-term commitment of children	9	5	4
Global Concerns	Concern for overpopulation	9	3	6
Personal Concerns	Uninterested in parenting	9	3	6
Financial Concerns	Importance of spouse's career	9	2	7
Intimacy & Relationship Concerns	Would not enjoy relationship with spouse as much if we had a child	8	3	5
Personal Concerns	Doubt personal competence in caring for a child	7	3	4
Financial Concerns	Career disadvantages having children might create	6	2	4
Global Concerns	Fear of deformed child or passing on an inherited condition	5	4	1
Freedom Issues	Freedom not to work	4	2	2
Freedom Issues	Freer sexual relations	4	2	2
Personal Concerns	Emotional cost to self	4	1	3
Personal Concerns	Fear of pregnancy & childbirth	3	3	-
Personal Concerns	View pregnancy as unattractive or unpleasant	3	3	-
Personal Concerns	Negative long-term effects of childbearing on woman's body	3	3	-
Personal Concerns	View mother/fatherhood role as negative or undesirable	1	-	1
Personal Concerns	Fear of not liking child	1	-	1
Personal Concerns	View childcare as drudgery	1	-	1
Personal Concerns	Dislike of children	-	-	-
Personal Concerns	Doubt spouse's competence in caring for a child	-	-	-

Criticisms, Disadvantages and Regrets of the Childfree Lifestyle

As indicated in Table 9, most respondents in the sample had personal contact with children between the ages of infancy and 16 years on the average of once or twice a month. (One male in the present sample did not respond to this question.)

Table 9

Average Amount of Personal Contact with Children (between infancy and 16 years) by Gender

		Gender	
Average Amount of Contact	n	Female	Male
Daily	3	1	2
Once or twice per week	7	4	3
Once or twice per month	12	6	6
Once or twice every 6 months	4	3	1
Once or twice per year	1	-	1

Of the total sample, one half found the personal contact they had with children to be somewhat enjoyable (10 females and 4 males). Slightly less than one third of the total sample (3 females and 6 males) found that the personal contact they had with children was, on the whole, very enjoyable. Five respondents (1 female and 4 males) found it bearable, and one female respondent reported that on the whole, personal contact with children was unpleasant. (One female respondent indicated more than one response, thereby accounting for the 15 rather than 14 responses for females in the sample.)

Twelve of the 28 respondents (4 females and 8 males) felt that there were no disadvantages to being childfree. Two female respondents were uncertain of this and fully one half of the total sample of 28 males and females felt that there were disadvantages to being childfree. These respondents (8 females and 6 males) included as disadvantages of being childless reasons such as:

i) loss of the positive aspects of childrearing (7 females, 4 males)
ii) lack of family life (2 females, 3 males)
iii) loneliness in old age (3 females, 2 males)
iv) a sense of non-continuance (1 female, 3 males)

Important for females but not for males in the present study were the following perceived disadvantages of childlessness:

i) the social pressure to have children (3 females)
ii) others' jealousy of the childfree lifestyle (3 females)
iii) the social isolation of childless couples (2 females)
iv) lack of fulfillment (1 female)

Other disadvantages of being childless reported by respondents in the present study were that: they would have been good parents, they would have had a lot to offer a child, and/or they would have enjoyed the companionship of a child.

In view of the perceived disadvantages of being childless, it is interesting to note that 25 of the total sample of 28 respondents (89.3%) stated that they did not regret their decision to remain childfree. Two respondents (1 each male and female) were uncertain as to whether they regretted their decision to remain childfree, and one female respondent (who was 82 years of age) indicated regretting her decision to remain childless for reasons such as lack of family life, a sense of non-continuance and loneliness in old age.

All but one (female) respondent in the total sample (96.4%) felt that there were advantages to being childfree. The advantages of being childfree as reported by these 27 respondents are described in Table 9.

Table 10

Advantages of the Childfree Choice by Frequency and Gender

		Gender	
Stated Advantage	n	Female	Male
Greater flexibility	26	12	14
Greater independence	24	10	14
Greater mobility	22	11	11
Greater freedom	22	10	12
Financial advantages	21	8	13
Fewer worries	20	10	10
Better relationship with spouse	17	8	9
Fewer responsibilities	17	8	9
Occupational advantages	14	5	9
Better relationship with family members	0	-	-
Other	1	-	1

One male respondent listed as an additional advantage to being childfree, the freedom for he and his wife to be more childlike in their relationship and lifestyle.

Twenty two respondents (78.6%) reported that they usually told people the truth when asked why they did not have, or were not planning to have, children (11 each females and males). Sixteen respondents (7 females and 9 males) encountered no pressure to have children, while the remaining 12 respondents reported some pressure in this direction. Of these 12 respondents, many encountered pressure from work associates, parents, other family members and friends to have children. Male but not female respondents encountered pressure from employers, television and newspapers. For females but not males, pressure stemmed from sources such as parents-in-law and magazines. Additional sources of pressure to have children included pressure from the government, pressure from self (i.e., trying to convince self to have children), and the pressure to have children that arose upon seeing an exceptional child.

The most common attitude of others to their childfree choice was reported by 21 of the 28 respondents (75%) as being neutral. If some people did react negatively to childless couples, it was perceived by 71.4% of respondents (10 each males and females) to be mostly as a result of jealousy and envy of the freedom of being childfree. Secondly, respondents felt that some people reacted negatively to childless couples because they believed that childless couples were selfish (9 females and 7 males). Six respondents (4 females and 2 males) felt that a negative reaction to childless couples was due to others' regret of having had children of their own.

Commitment to Remaining Childless

Of the 13 couples who responded to the question of birth control, 61.5% used sterilization as a method of birth control. Within these 8 couple dyads, 3 males and 6 females had been sterilized. Of the 6 sterilized females, 2 had had hysterectomies. Twenty three percent of the sample who responded to this question (i.e., 3 couples) used the birth control pill and 15.4% (i.e., 2 couples) used condoms to prevent pregnancy.

In one couple dyad, both husband and wife had been sterilized (the female by hysterectomy), and one couple dyad did not indicate their method of birth control.

Table 11

Present Method of Birth Control by Gender

		Gender	
Method	n	Female	Male
Sterilization	7	4	3
Sterilization (hysterectomy)	2	2	-
Birth control pill	3	3	-
Condom	2	-	2
Totals	14	9	5

Table 11 details future consideration of sterilization for respondents in couple dyads in which neither husband nor wife had been sterilized (n=6 each males and females). One male in the sample did not respond to this question, and one female respondent indicated more than one answer to the question, thereby accounting for the discrepancy in totals.

Table 12

Future Consideration of Sterilization by Gender

Consideration of Sterilization	n	Gender Female	Male
At some time in the next year	2	1	1
At some time in the distant future	4	3	1
At no time	3	1	2
Uncertain about becoming steril.	3	2	1
Totals	12	7	5

In only one of the six couples that were presently not sterilized did both members of the couple dyad indicate that they would not consider sterilization at any time. (The wife of the second male who responded accordingly was uncertain about becoming sterilized.) Reasons for not considering sterilization as a method of birth control included that it was not necessary due to age, not necessary due to the infrequency of intercourse, and unnecessary due to the "flawless" effectiveness of the method presently employed.

As detailed in Table 12, within the female sample 4 respondents indicated that they would have an abortion in the event of an accidental pregnancy. Of these 4 respondents, 3 indicated that they would choose this option with or without their spouses' support, and 1 respondent indicated that she would choose this option only with her husband's support. Three female respondents indicated that they would go through with the pregnancy and adjust to parenthood with or without their spouses' support; 1 female respondent indicated that she would choose to parent only with her husband's support.

Five of the 13 female respondents who answered this question (38.5%) were uncertain as to what they would do in the event of an accidental pregnancy and 1 respondent left this question blank. None of the respondents (female or male) chose adoption as a viable option in the event of an accidental pregnancy.

Table 13

Options in the Event of Accidental Pregnancy by Female Gender

Option	n
Abortion with or without spouse's support	3
Abortion only with spouse's support	1
Parenthood with or without spouse's support	3
Parenthood only with spouse's support	1
Uncertain	5

Of the total sample of 14 male respondents, 5 indicated that in the event of an accidental pregnancy they would support their spouses' decision to have an abortion. One male respondent indicated that he would insist his wife have an abortion, even if she was uncertain about it. Another respondent indicated that he would support his wife's decision, but would try to talk her into having an abortion. A further 5 male respondents indicated that they would choose to have the child and adjust to parenthood, but only with their wife's support.

Although only 2 male respondents actually stated that they were uncertain as to what they would do in the event of an accidental pregnancy, the uncertainty of many of the male respondents in this decision was evidenced by the number and variety of options they chose, as detailed in Table 12. In five cases, the implicit or explicit message was that these husbands would support their wives in any direction she thought they should proceed.

Table 14

Options in the Event of Accidental Pregnancy by Male Gender

	Code Number												
Option	1	2	4	5	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Support wife's decision to have an abortion			4			8		10	11	12			
Insist wife have an abortion even if she was uncertain about it	1												
Want to have the child with or without wife's support													
Want to have child but only with wife's support					7	8			11	12	13		
Uncertain as to what I would do										12		14	
Other (support wife in any direction)		2				8			11	12			15
Other (support wife's decision but try to talk her into having an abortion)				5									
Other (not applicable due to hysterectomy)							9						

Of the total sample, 11 females (78.6%) and 10 males (71.4%) stated that there was no possibility that they would consider having children in the future. A within couple dyad analysis revealed that 10 of the total 14 couples in the sample were mutually agreeable on this point. Four respondents (2 each females and males) stated that there was a possibility that they would consider having children in the future, and 3 respondents (1 female and 2 males) were uncertain about the possibility of having children in the future.

Similarly, 20 respondents in the total sample of 28 (71.4%) indicated that they would not consider the possibility of having children with their new spouses in the event that they were to enter into another relationship. Six respondents (3 each females and males) were uncertain about this matter and 2 male (but no female) respondents indicated that they would consider the possibility of having children if they were to enter into another relationship.

There was a great deal of individual consistency between the two foregoing questions (possibility of having children in the future and possibility of having children in a new relationship). That is, 23 of the 28 respondents (82.1%) replied consistently (yes, no, or uncertain) to both of these questions. More males than females replied consistently; 9 males answered "no" to both questions, 2 males responded affirmatively to both questions, and 2 males were "uncertain" in both cases. Conversely, all female respondents with consistent responses (n=10) responded "no" to both questions.

Chapter V

Discussion and Conclusion

Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe the childfree alternative to a family lifestyle. Specifically, a profile of the childfree couple; reasons for making the childfree choice; how the decision to remain childfree is made; criticisms, disadvantages and regrets; and commitment to remaining childless were studied. A description of the findings in each of these five areas will be reviewed and discussed.

Profile of the Childfree Couple

Previous studies have found that voluntarily childfree couples tend to marry at a later age than parented couples (Feldman, 1981; Heller, Tsai, & Chalfant, 1986; Krishnan, 1989; Pol, 1983; Rowland, 1982; Wilson, 1986). The mean age of first marriage for respondents in this study, however, was consistent with the 1988 Alberta means of 25.1 years for females and 27.5 years for males (Statistics Canada Health Reports, Supplement No. 16, 1990), compared to mean age at first marriage in the present sample of 25.4 years and 27 years for females and males respectively. However, as the Alberta statistics included all couples (those with the intention to have children and those intending to remain childfree), they are minimally useful for comparison in this case.

Similar to the findings of previous studies of voluntarily childless couples, a great majority of respondents in the present study were college or university graduates. This seems to lend support to the claim of other researchers that the likelihood of childlessness increases with number of years of schooling (Veevers, 1980). However, in view of the fact that 5 of the 14 couples who participated in the present study did so as the result of a notice in a University publication, and that Rosenthal and Rosnow have found that volunteer subjects are generally better educated than those who do not volunteer (Travers, 1978), such findings must be viewed with caution.

In comparison to the results of previous studies in which childfree women were found to have higher levels of education than corresponding childfree men (Rowland, 1982; Veevers, 1979, 1980; Wilson, 1986), the present study is one of the very few studies of voluntarily childless couples that does not support this finding. Rather, couples in the current study tended to have very closely matched levels of education within couple dyads.

The findings of the present study with regards to religious affiliation support Veevers' (1979) conclusion that many studies have found that a large number of childless couples have no religious affiliation. For example, while more than half of respondents in the present sample declared that they had no present religious preference, and 71.5% of the sample never attended church (or attended less than once a year), only 1 of the total 28 respondents claimed no religion in childhood. As with other studies, these findings must be interpreted with great care. Rather than being supportive of the claim that the childless choice is indicative of deviant behavior (Heller et al, 1986; Veevers, 1979, 1980), or that childless couples are less religious than other couples, such findings may indicate a number of other things. For example, perhaps many parents who regularly attend a church or house of worship do so on behalf of, or for the sake of, their children.

A significant proportion of the childless couples in the present study reported a very happy marital relationship and expressed a preference to spend time in each others' company rather than going out with others or spending time alone. This tendency has been reported by many other researchers (Burgwyn, 1981; Nason & Poloma, 1976; Rowland, 1982; Veevers, 1980; Wilson, 1986) and lends support to Burgwyn's claim that for voluntarily childfree couples, a relationship characterized by intimacy, dependence on and preoccupation with the other spouse often develops. As one of the female respondents in the present study declared, "We are very happily married and I don't want to jeopardize that. I'm not sure I could share my husband with a child." While Burgwyn (1981) found that it was especially important for women to preserve and nurture the special relationship they had with their husbands, in the current study, all but 1 of the 14 male respondents preferred to spend their leisure time alone with their spouse, while only 10 of the 13 female respondents who answered this question expressed a like preference. If spending time alone with one's spouse may be considered important to the preservation and nurturing of a special one-to-one relationship, it would appear that, at least for the present sample, this was as or more important for the male than the female respondents.

How the Decision to Remain Childfree is Made

More than one third (i.e., 39.3%) of respondents in the present study made a personal decision to remain childfree before their relationship with their spouse began. While 7 of these 11 respondents were "early articulators" (i.e., persons who made the decision to remain childfree in their childhood or early adolescent years), 5 of the early articulators were women and only 2 were men. This supports Veevers' (1980) findings that few males are early articulators.

However, while the male respondents in Veevers' study tended to equate the childfree decision with the decision to marry a particular woman, this was not the trend in the current study. Of the 14 males in the present study, only 5 reported that their decision to remain childfree was either not made until their present spouse stated her opinion (n=2), or was due to their present relationship rather than their own desire not to have children (n=3). More importantly, only 2 of these 5 respondents indicated that they would consider having children in the future and/or would consider having children in the event that they were to enter into a new marital relationship. (Of the remaining 3 male respondents, 2 answered "no" to both of these questions and 1 male indicated that he was uncertain about them.)

The present study also fails to support the findings of Nason and Poloma's (1976) study, in which wives appeared more likely than husbands to be personally committed to remaining childfree both in their present marriages and in future situations. For example, in the present study, only 1 wife who indicated that she would not consider having children in the future had a spouse who indicated that he would consider children. Conversely, 2 of the wives who indicated that they would consider having children in the future had partners who indicated they were uncertain whether or not they too would consider having children in the future. While Nason and Poloma claimed that for husbands, the childfree decision in the present marriage would not necessarily carry over into another relationship, 9 of the 10 men in the present study who stated that they would not consider having children in the future also stated that they would not consider having children in a new relationship. (Of the 11 female respondents who declared that they would not consider having children in the future, 10 also stated that they would not consider having children in a new relationship.)

The decision to remain childfree had been mutually initiated by 8 couples in the present study. That is, in 8 couple dyads, both members agreed that they had mutually initiated the decision to remain childless. In one couple dyad both members agreed that the husband had initiated the childfree decision. In the remaining 5 couple dyads, there were discrepancies as to who had initiated the decision: 2 males felt that it had been a mutual decision while their wives reported they themselves had initiated the childfree decision, and 2 females felt it had been a mutual decision while their husbands reported that they themselves had initiated the decision to remain childfree. For the remaining couple, the female reported that the decision had been mutually initiated while her husband reported that they had taken turns; one initiated and the other rejected and vice versa.

While other researchers have described distinct patterns as to when the decision to remain childfree was made (Nason & Poloma, 1976; Rowland, 1982; Veevers, 1980), half of the couples in the present study gave discrepant answers to this question (see Table 7). Of the 7 couples who were in agreement as to when the decision to remain childless had been made, 3 couples made the decision before marriage, 1 couple reported making the decision 1-3 years after marriage, and 3 couples made the decision to remain childfree 4 or more years after-marriage.

Nine of the 14 couples in the present study were in agreement as to how they had made the decision to remain childless. Seven couples indicated that the decision had been made gradually over a period of years, and 2 couples indicated that it had been made suddenly. While the remaining 5 couples were not in agreement with each other as to how they had made the decision to remain childfree, none of these respondents indicated that they had come to the decision by postponing childbearing until some vague time in the future, as did 14 of the 30 respondents in Nason and Poloma's (1976) study.

In her 1980 study, Veevers noted two distinct patterns of how the decision to remain childfree was made. The first pattern, in which couples came to a decision to remain childfree and explicitly stated their wishes before marriage, was found in the present study. However, of the 11 respondents who indicated that they and their spouses made a decision to remain childfree before marriage, in only 3 couple dyads did both members report this. The second pattern Veevers noted was that of postponing children until childbearing was no longer desirable. Two female and 1 male respondent in the present study indicated that this was how they and their spouses had come to be childless, however, the corresponding spouses all indicated that the decision had been made gradually over a period of years rather than by constant postponement. As one female respondent put it, "When we got married, we never intentionally planned not to have children. We put it off for a couple of years, then another couple of years ... The longer you wait, the harder it is."

While in Veevers' (1980) study, two thirds of the sample had postponed children until they were no longer desirable, only a small proportion (10.7%) of respondents in the present study comprised such a group. Likewise, as previously reported, studies in which only a small portion of respondents postpone children until it is too late are not uncommon (e.g., Rowland, 1982). In fact, as only 7 of the 14 couples in the present sample were in agreement with one another as to when they had made the decision to remain childless, it is difficult to report any pattern of decision making. What is important to note is that there appears to be a great amount of discrepancy within couple dyads in the present sample as to when each respondent perceived they and their spouse came to make the decision not to have children. The discrepancies within couple dyads, both as to who initiated the decision to remain childfree and when the decision was made, seem to indicate that making the childfree choice is a complex process that cannot easily be described or deciphered in the asking of a few questions.

Reasons for Choosing the Childfree Lifestyle

Reasons for choosing not to have children rated as important to respondents in the present study were very similar to reasons reported in previous studies in which both husbands and wives had been included (Burgwyn, 1981; Rowland, 1982; Wilson, 1986). As in Burgwyn's study in which the word used most often by couples when describing reasons for their childfree choice was "freedom," reasons listed most frequently by respondents in the present study also contained this theme. Freedom to travel and greater personal freedom were listed as reasons for choosing the childfree lifestyle by 19 of the total 28 respondents in the present study. Eighteen respondents indicated another freedom issue - greater time for self - as one reason for making the childfree choice. Rowland (1982) also found that greater personal freedom and greater time for self (and partner) were important reasons for both voluntarily childfree men and women in her study.

In Rowland's study, reasons for the childfree choice given by women but not men were career disadvantages having children might create and disinterest in parenting. The reverse is true for men and women in the present study: twice as many males as females stated both that career disadvantages and disinterest in parenting were reasons influencing their childfree choice. And, while nearly one third of respondents in the present study indicated that concern for overpopulation was one reason for making the childfree choice, and 5 respondents indicated that fear of having a deformed child or passing on an inherited condition influenced their decision not to parent, these reasons were unimportant or not applicable to respondents in Rowland's sample.

While for respondents in both Rowland's (1982) study and men and women in the present study, fear of not liking the child and dislike of children were not given as reasons for making the childfree choice, most respondents in Veevers' (1980) study reported disinterest in, or in some cases an active dislike of, children. Respondents in the present study reported that on the whole, the personal contact they had with children was very enjoyable, somewhat enjoyable, or bearable. Only one (female) respondent found the personal contact she had with children to be unpleasant.

Yet another reason for making the childfree choice is discussed by both Burgwyn (1981) and Veevers (1980), who reported that a statistically large number of childfree persons are only or eldest children. In the present study, slightly over half of the respondents were only or eldest children (i.e., 4 were only children, comprising 3 females and 1 male, and 11 were eldest children, comprising 5 females and 6 males). Burgwyn has proposed that the reason that a large proportion of voluntarily childless persons are only or eldest children may be that only children may doubt their personal competence in childcare, while eldest children, often saddled with the care of younger siblings, may have few illusions left about the drudgery of childcare and therefore choose not to parent. However, none of the 11 first-born respondents in the present study indicated that this was a reason for their childfree choice. (The 1 [male] respondent who did choose this category was neither an only nor an eldest child.) Conversely, 2 respondents who were first-born children (1 each male and female) declared that doubt of their personal competence in caring for a child was one reason for their childfree choice. Two only children in the present sample (1 each male and female) also indicated that this was a reason for their decision to remain childfree. While these results do not seem to lend support to Burgwyn's theory as to why there is a propensity of eldest and only children among the voluntarily childfree (at least insofar as eldest children are concerned), it is interesting to note that of respondents in the present study who indicated that disinterest in parenting was a reason for their childfree choice, many were first-born or only children (i.e., 6 of the 9 respondents who chose this reason were either first-born [4] or only [2] children). Disinterest in parenting may result for any number of reasons, including disinterest due to feelings of incompetence in childrearing or saturation of childcare experiences. Further research in this area seems indicated.

Rowland (1982) found that greater spousal intimacy was one reason important to women but not men in making the childfree choice. This finding was not supported in the present study. While more women than men reported that one reason for their childfree choice was that the presence of children would be detrimental to an intimate spousal relationship, this reason was, nonetheless, important to several of the male respondents. As well, more men than women reported that they would not enjoy their relationship with their spouse as much if they had a child (5 men, 3 women). While this reason does not specifically state intimacy concerns, it does suggest that males in the present study are at least as concerned with maintaining a special relationship with their spouses as are females.

Another interesting finding arising from reasons respondents in the present study gave for making the childfree choice was in the category of financial concerns. While other researchers have found that the childless choice was sometimes made in part because it left women free to pursue a career (Veevers, 1980), or was important for women (but not for men) due to concern for the career disadvantages children may create (Rowland, 1982), these findings were not supported in the present study. Not only did more males than females report that the importance of their own career influenced their decision to remain childless, but many more male than female respondents in the present study chose to remain childless in part because of the importance of their spouse's career. It would appear that changing gender roles and expectations, and expectations for a higher standard of living may influence fertility decision-making. This is an area in which further research is indicated.

Respondents in the present study indicated many of the same advantages of being childfree as did the older respondents in Wilson's (1986) study. Things such as greater freedom and flexibility, fewer worries, greater mobility, greater independence, less responsibility, better relationship with spouse and financial and occupational advantages were important to the childless couples in both studies. It is interesting to note once again that the occupational advantage of remaining childfree was the least frequently chosen advantage for females in the present study: only 5 females (compared to 9 males) indicated that this was an advantage of the childfree choice for them. Similarly, more males than females listed financial advantage as being an advantage of childlessness. That male respondents in the present study more frequently than females listed both occupational advantages and financial advantages lends support to other findings of the present study (as discussed above); namely, contrary to previous studies of childfree couples (Rowland, 1982; Veevers, 1980, Wilson, 1986), female respondents in the present study did not view the career and/or financial advantages of remaining childless as being as important as did male respondents. What these findings do support, however, is Veevers' observation that the childfree choice leaves childless men free, not only not to work for the sake of their children, but not to work for the sake of their wives either (1980). While perhaps traditionally, few wives have had to support a husband and children, this has certainly been the case for many husbands.

Criticisms, Disadvantages and Regrets of the Childfree Lifestyle

In the present study, 50% of respondents indicated that there were disadvantages of being childless, compared with 42% of respondents in Rowland's (1982) study who indicated this. Many more of Rowland's sample than respondents in the present study were uncertain as to whether there were disadvantages, and an equal number of respondents in both studies felt that there were no disadvantages of the childfree choice. Two of the disadvantages expressed by respondents in Rowland's study, lack of family life and loss of the positive aspects of childrearing, were also included as disadvantages by respondents in the present study. However, while respondents in Rowland's study expressed, as part of four main disadvantages of the childfree choice, social isolation, social pressure and jealousy, these were perceived as disadvantages by only a few (female) respondents in the present study.

Two findings in the present study seem to indicate that marriages in which couples remain childless by choice are becoming more acceptable. First, many couples in the present study seemed to find that societal pressure to have children was insignificant enough that these respondents were free to tell people the truth when asked about their childless state. This was also the case for respondents in Nason and Poloma's (1976) study. Second, nearly 60% of respondents in the present study encountered no pressure at all to have children. In fact, 75% of respondents indicated that the most common attitude of others to their childfree choice was neutral. Therefore, if voluntarily childfree couples are, on the whole, no longer labelled as undesirable and treated as such, the labelling model, described by Veevers (1980) as one of the models from which the negative meaning associated with voluntarily childless couples derives, may no longer be considered as a viable reason that some people consider childfree couples with disfavor.

Nearly 90% of all respondents (male and female) in the present study stated that they did not regret their decision to remain childless. In the present study, as in Rowland's (1982) study, more men than women stated that they did not regret their childfree choice. However, significantly more respondents in the present study than in Rowland's study indicated no regret for their childfree choice (i.e., 92.8% of males and 85.7% of females in the present study did not regret their choice, compared to 80% of males and 75% of females in Rowland's sample who responded similarly). While only 2 respondents (one each male and female) in the present study were uncertain whether or not they regretted their childfree choice, 11% of the men and 19% of the women in Rowland's study reported that they were uncertain as to whether or not they regretted their decision. In fact, Rowland's sample was, on the whole, far more uncertain of both whether there were disadvantages of the childfree choice and whether they regretted their decision not to parent than were respondents in the present sample.

Only one (female) respondent in the present study indicated regretting the childfree choice (for reasons of loneliness in old age and a sense of non-continuance), while 12.5% of respondents in Wilson's (1986) study of both older voluntarily and non-voluntarily childless couples expressed a sense of aloneness as being the worst part about being childless, and 20% of Wilsons's respondents expressed a sense of non-continuance as being the worst part. It is interesting to note that the eldest respondent by far in the present study shared regrets similar to those of older childless couples in Wilson's study. However, it remains to be seen if regretting the childfree choice appears (to a greater extent) with advanced age. While respondents in both Wilson's study and the present study who expressed regretting the fact that they did not have children were advanced in their years, in both studies they represented a very small portion of the total sample, and, at least for some respondents in Wilson's study, the childless state was not always a voluntary one.

Commitment to Remaining Childless

Using Nason and Poloma's four typologies of commitment to childlessness (as discussed in Chapter II), what becomes most readily clear is that many more couples in the present study than in Nason and Poloma's (1976) study were irrevocably committed to remaining childfree. In the present study, in 8 of the 13 couple dyads who responded to this question (61.5%), one or both members had been sterilized, compared to the 16.7% (or 5 couples out of 30) in Nason and Poloma's study who had been sterilized. Within these 8 couple dyads in the present study, 6 of the sterilized respondents had made the individual decision to remain childfree before they met their spouses.

None of the couples in the present study could be described as fitting into Nason and Poloma's second typology - that of the strongly committed - while 8 of the 30 couples in Nason and Poloma's study fit into this category. Of the 5 couples in the present study who did employ effective contraception (i.e., the birth control pill or condom), none fit all of the other qualifications of this typology (such as choosing abortion over parenthood in the case of an accidental pregnancy, consideration of sterilization, and a firm decision to remain childfree). Rather, couples in the present study were more inclined to be reasonably committed (the third typology), in that concern about their course of action in the event of an accidental pregnancy or doubt of the permanence of their childfree choice separated them from those couples who could be typed as strongly committed to remaining childfree. Again, the reasonably committed in the present study (4 of the 14 couples) comprised a far smaller proportion than those in Nason and Poloma's study (in which 12 of 30 couples were reasonably committed to the childfree choice).

Lastly, 2 of the total 14 couples in the present study fell into the category termed by Nason and Poloma as "committed with reservations." These couples were separated from the reasonably committed on the issue of abortion, and expressed uncertainty as to the permanence of their decision not to parent in that, in the event of an accidental pregnancy, they would choose to have the child and adjust to parenthood.

While it is not unusual to find a varying degree of commitment among voluntarily childless couples to remaining so, it is interesting to note the significant difference between the number of irrevocably committed (i.e.

sterilized) couples in Nason and Poloma's (1976) study and in the present study 14 years later. In the former study, only one sixth of the sample had been sterilized; in the latter study, more than one half of the sample had been sterilized. While one clearly cannot make conclusions as to what this difference is due to, this is an important area of voluntary childlessness in which further research is needed.

Similar to the findings of Veevers' (1980) study in which early articulators tended to be sterilized, of the 7 early articulators in the present study, all but one had been sterilized, or had a spouse who was sterilized. However, while more than half of Veevers' sample were childless as a result of their spouses' wishes rather than their own desire not to have children, only 3 male respondents in the present study felt that the childfree decision was due to their present relationship rather than their own desire to remain childless. (Of these 3 respondents, the wife of one had had a hysterectomy.) Curiously, of these 3 respondents, 2 reported that the childfree decision had been mutually initiated with their spouse, and that they and their spouse were equally committed to remaining childless. These responses appear to contradict the respondents' initial claim that the childfree choice was as a result of their present relationship rather than their own desire not to have children.

Such seemingly contradictory information in the present study and in other studies illustrates the importance of exploring, in more detail than has previously been the case, both the decision to remain childfree and commitment to the childfree choice. (For example, in Veevers' research on how the decision to remain childfree was made, while Veevers found that the voluntarily childless made their decision either independently prior to marriage, or remained childless due to continued postponement, other studies [including the current study] have not always found similar patterns. However, this may be largely due to the differences in the way in which data are collected.)

While sterilization may indeed be one indication of commitment to remaining childless, it does not necessarily indicate that the decision not to parent is irrevocable in the present partnership, as Nason and Poloma (1976) suggested. Couple dyads in which both partners have been sterilized may still consider adoption, thereby rendering their decision not to parent revocable. Similarly, couple dyads in which only one member has been sterilized may also have children by employing any one of the alternative methods of conception available today, thereby also rendering their "irrevocable" decision revocable. As Veevers has aptly noted, the voluntarily childfree who have been sterilized cannot be assumed to be more committed to the childfree choice than those who have chosen another method of contraception, and who may rely on abortion should the need arise.

Two further points of note pertaining to commitment to childlessness were found in the present study. First, for respondents in the present study, many more women than men were sterilized or employed some method of birth control in their couple dyad. That is, of the 13 couples who responded to this question, 9 females but only 5 males employed some form of birth control (6 females and 3 males were sterilized, 3 females used the birth control pill, and 2 males used condoms to prevent pregnancy). Secondly, that both the prevention of pregnancy and the decision necessitated in the event of contraceptive failure was clearly the woman's responsibility was further underlined by male respondents in the present study by the option(s) they chose in the event of an accidental pregnancy (see Table 12). Many male respondents indicated, either explicitly or implicitly, that in the case of an accidental pregnancy, they would support their wife's decision *in any direction she chose to proceed.* This supports Nason and Poloma's observation that since women bear the brunt of childrearing responsibilities, they tend to have greater say in (and greater responsibility to maintain) the childfree decision, while husbands are willing to support their wife should she desire not to have (or to have) children.

Interestingly, in view of Veevers' (1980) findings that many men are childless as a result of their spouse's wish rather than their own desire not to have children, none of the male respondents in the present study indicated that, in the event of an accidental pregnancy, they would want to have the child without their wife's support. While this cannot be considered a direct indication of these husbands' personal desire not to parent, it would appear that for male respondents in the present study, the desire not to parent is a less situational choice than was found in Veevers' sample. Were their childfree choice situational, one could speculate that the male respondents in the present study would be willing to assume the fatherhood role in the absence of their wife's support, and thereby fulfill their personal desire for children. Alternately, many of the females in the present study who indicated that they would chose abortion or parenthood in the event of an accidental pregnancy stated that they would do so with or without their husbands' support. None of the female respondents indicated that they would leave the decision to their husbands (as did many of the male respondents).

As was the case in Veevers' (1980) study, female respondents in Nason and Poloma's (1976) study also appeared to be more likely to remain desirous of childlessness in both their present marriages and future situations than did their spouses. This is an area in which personal commitment to remaining childfree for both genders can most clearly be described in the present study. What becomes most apparent is that the present study does not support the findings of previous studies (Nason and Poloma, 1976; Veevers, 1980) in this regard. The number of male and female respondents reporting both that they would neither consider having children in the future (11 females, 10 males), nor consider having children with a new spouse (11 females, 9 males), was very closely matched. Respondents' internal consistency between these two questions was also very closely matched between gender: 10 females and 9 males responded "no" to both consideration of children in the future and consideration of children with a new spouse.

In conclusion, it can be said that for a great majority of males in the present study, the decision to remain childfree was not equated with the decision to marry a particular woman, nor did the present study support the findings of previous studies that males did not think about fertility decisions (Veevers, 1980). Of the 11 male respondents in the present study who were certain of when they had made the personal decision to remain childfree, 5 males had come to the decision before they met their present spouses, and 13 of the 14 total male respondents reported that the childfree decision had been mutually initiated with their spouses, or initiated by themselves. None of the male respondents reported that their spouse had initiated the decision to remain childfree. Thirteen of the 14 males in the present study did not regret their childfree choice, and, as previously stated, 10 males reported that they would not consider having children in the future, either with their present spouse or in a new relationship.

While some male respondents in the present study indicated that the decision to remain childfree had been made when their spouse stated that she did not want children (n=2), or that they were childless due to their present relationship rather than a personal desire not to have children (n=3), only 2 of these 5 respondents (or 14.3% of the entire male sample) declared that they would consider having children in the future with their present spouse or in a new relationship. However, this is by far a smaller and less significant proportion than was found in previous studies (Nason and Poloma, 1976; Veevers, 1980).

Finally, while certainly not conclusive, the concept of hypogamy (i.e., marriage of a person to someone whose status is lower in some respect than their own) as a determining factor in fertility decision-making does not appear to be supported in the present study. Five females and 6 males had higher levels of education than their spouses; the remaining respondents had equal levels of education within couple dyads. In previous studies, researchers had overwhelmingly found that childfree women had higher levels of education than corresponding childfree men (e.g., Rowland, 1982; Veevers, 1979, 1980; Wilson, 1986).

Education is not the only category in which male or female hypogamy may occur. Salary may also be a determining factor. In the present study, only 1 male respondent reported earning a smaller income than his wife. One couple was equally matched in this category, and for the remaining 12 couples, husbands' gross yearly income was significantly higher than the income of corresponding wives'. At least in the category of income, for respondents in the present study, male hypogamy abounds.

The abundance of categories contributing to male or female hypogamy make this hypothesis exceedingly difficult to test or to support. While findings in the present study appear to lean towards male hypogamy, how this relates to the childfree choice is highly inconclusive at this point in time, yet certainly worthy of further investigation.

Future Research

The present study has made an effort to illuminate and describe five aspects of the childfree lifestyle. While some previous findings were supported in the present study, others were not. What was shown to be especially important for all future research of fertility decision-making and the childfree alternative is that standardized measures must be developed and used in order that the findings of one study not only be comparable to those of previous studies, but share the same meaning. Causal-comparative research, in which voluntarily childfree and voluntarily parented couples are simultaneously studied, is urgently needed.

The current study leaves several questions unanswered:

1. What role does hypogamy play in fertility decision-making?
2. What are the significantly greater number of sterilized respondents in the present study than in previous studies indicative of?
3. Why is it that a great number of childfree couples nurture a special, intimate one-to-one relationship with their spouses? Is this also true of the majority of couples with children?
4. Does early articulation of the childfree choice and/or sterilization necessarily indicate a stronger commitment to childlessness? Could

females more frequently than males be early articulators for reasons other than that males simply do not think about fertility decisions?

5. What factors separate those who make a conscious decision - for *or* against having children - from those who do not think about or plan for this?
6. What are the aspects influencing fertility decision-making that have not yet been explored? For example, how do factors such as cognitive and/or moral development influence the childfree choice?
7. What role do modelling and socialization play in the childfree choice (i.e., what impact do factors such as culture, race and/or ethnicity have in fertility decision-making)?
8. Do childfree couples display a concern for generativity (in a form other than that involved in having children), and if so, what form does it take?

These questions could be addressed in future research by using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative studies which strive to understand how the fertility decision is made, both personally and within couple dyads, may provide information which quantitative research methods could not provide. Early articulation of fertility decision-making could be investigated in longitudinal or cross-sectional studies. Further studies, utilizing both survey instruments and interview methods, could be aimed at investigating hypogamy as it relates to both intentionally childfree and intentionally parented couples. The role of hypogamy in fertility decision-making may also be better understood through qualitative studies of how the decision to remain childless (or to become parented) is made.

The impact of moral development as it affects fertility decision-making could be investigated using, for example, Lawrence Kohlberg's or Jean Piaget's theories of the levels of development of moral thought. The affect of cognitive development as it relates to fertility decision-making could also be investigated using Piaget's theory. As well, Erikson's eight stages of human development, and specifically that of "achieving generativity versus stagnation" (Rice, 1987, p. 95), could form the basis of research investigating how the need for generativity is mastered among the voluntarily childfree.

The current study, if replicated using a larger sample and a comparison group of intentionally parented couples, could yield data of considerable use.

The dynamics of couple dyads (both for voluntarily childfree couples and voluntarily parented couples), and gender differences in the meaning and role of parenting and non-parenting in society need to be investigated further to determine their impact on fertility decision-making.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Media-Psychology Radio Program Request for Sample

VOLUNTARILY CHILDLESS COUPLES ARE NEEDED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

If you and your spouse:

- have been married for five years or longer
- have made a permanent, voluntary decision not to have children
- are **both** willing to participate in a study of childfree couples

please call Rosemary Moulden at 492-7977 or 492-0963.

APPENDIX B

Request for Sample in Adult-only Living Complexes and Government of Alberta Business Offices

CHILDLESS?

Voluntarily childless couples are needed for a University of Alberta thesis study. If you and your spouse:

- have been married for five years or longer
- have made a permanent, voluntary decision to remain childfree
- have never reared children
- are both willing to complete a confidential survey pertaining to voluntary childlessness (completion time approximately 20-30 minutes)

please contact

Rosemary Moulden at 492-5245 (days) or
431-1876 (evenings and weekends)

for an appointment.

The anonymity of your responses is assured.

APPENDIX C

The University of Alberta *Folio* Notice

CHILDLESS?

Voluntarily childless couples are needed for a thesis study. If you and your spouse are willing to complete a brief, confidential, anonymous survey, please contact Rosemary Moulden at 492-5245.

APPENDIX D

The *Edmonton Journal* Notice

CHILDLESS?

Voluntarily childless couples are needed for a University of Alberta thesis study. If you and your spouse: have been married 5 years or longer; have made a permanent, vountary decision not to have children; and have never reared children, please come to the University of Alberta, Education Bldg., Room 165, (87 Ave. & 113 St.) on TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13 at 7:00 p.m., or call Rosemary at 431-1876 or 492-5245. Anonymity is assured.

APPENDIX E

Procedures to Follow and Information Given to Callers

1. **Procedures to follow with callers:**

   Check that all requirements are met (i.e., that respondents):

   - have been married to each other for five years or longer
   - have made a permanent, voluntary decision not to have children and intend to remain childfree (although biologically capable of having children)
   - have never reared children
   - are both willing to participate in the study

2. **Information to give to callers:**

   - thank callers for responding and tell them how important their participation is to the study

   - the survey will take approximately 20 to 25 minutes to complete

   - all information will be anonymous and will be used for research purposes only

   - the study is a descriptive study of voluntarily childlessness, focusing on areas such as how the decision is made, reasons for making the decision, and consequences of the childfree choice

APPENDIX F

Letter to Respondents Accompanying Mailed Surveys

November, 1990

Dear Respondents,

Thank you for responding to the appeal for voluntarily childless couples. The focus of my thesis research is voluntarily childless couples who:

- have been married for five years or longer
- have made a permanent, voluntary decision not to have children
- have never reared children
- are both willing to complete a survey (completion time approximately 20-25 minutes)

If both you and your spouse do not meet all of the above criteria, please do not proceed with this study. Rather, mail the incompleted enclosed surveys back to the researcher in the stamped, self-addressed envelope provided.

This research study explores areas such as how the decision to remain childfree is made, reasons for making the childfree choice, and effects of the childfree lifestyle. **The anonymity of your responses is assured as your name is not requested on the survey,** and the researcher will destroy any record of your name and address once your responses have been received or you have indicated that you do not wish to participate in this study.

Attached are two identical surveys. **It is vital to this study that you and your spouse complete your surveys independently of one another. Please do not consult with your spouse while you are completing the survey.** Once you have completed and mailed the surveys, you are free to discuss your responses with one another.

Before you begin, please sign the "Disclaimer" attached to each survey. The Disclaimers must be signed and returned with the surveys in order that your responses may be included in this study.

Please read the instructions found on page one of the survey carefully before beginning.

When you and your spouse have both completed your survey, please enclose both surveys, along with the signed disclaimers, in the stamped, self-addressed envelope provided. Due to the time constraints of this study, **may I look forward to receiving your completed surveys by Wednesday, December 5th.** Thank you very much for your time and cooperation. Your input to this research is invaluable.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Moulden

APPENDIX G

Subject Disclaimer

November, 1990

PLEASE READ THIS DISCLAIMER CAREFULLY. THE INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE IS INTENDED FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES ONLY. YOU MAY BE ASSURED OF THE ANONYMITY OF YOUR RESPONSES.

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study of voluntarily childfree couples. The main purpose of this study is to describe the childfree alternative to a family lifestyle. Please answer as many of the questions as you are able.

By signing this disclaimer, you are giving your consent to participate in the study. Your name is not requested on the questionnaire, and **you may be assured of the anonymity of your responses.**

You may choose not to answer some or all of the questions if you so desire. You are free to ask questions of the researcher and receive answers to them at any point.

Although your participation in this study is very important, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without incurring ill will. There are no known risks in participating in this study.

____

APPENDIX H

Survey of Voluntarily Childfree Couples

Questionnaire Code Number ____ ______

INSTRUCTIONS:

- **Please do not consult with your spouse at any time while you are completing this survey.**
- **Answer each question carefully. Take as much time as you need to answer the questions.**
- **Please answer as many of the questions as you are able and feel comfortable completing.**
- **Your name is not requested, and you may be assured of the anonymity of your responses.**
- **Please begin when you are ready.**

SECTION I

For the following questions, please place a checkmark beside as many answers as are applicable to you, or fill in the blanks where needed.

1. Are you childless by choice? ____Yes ____ No
   (If you answered "No," please consult the researcher before continuing with the survey.)

2. How did you come to participate in this study?

   ____ through an appeal on CJCA's "That's Living" program
   ____ through an advertisement in Folio
   ____ through a notice at my place of residence
   ____ through a notice at place of business
   ____ other (please specify) ______________________________

3. Age ____ years

4. Sex ____ Male ____ Female

5. How long have you been married to your present spouse? ____ years

6. How old were you when you married for the first time? ____ years

7. Are you the only child in your family? ____ Yes ____ No

8. Are you the first-born child in your family? ____ Yes ____ No

9. Present area of residence

____ city
____ town
____ farm
____ acreage
____ other (please specify) ______________________________

10. Level of education

____ graduate degree
____ undergraduate degree
____ some university education
____ college diploma
____ some college education
____ technical institute or trade training
____ high school graduate
____ some high school education
____ other (please specify) ______________________________

11. Occupation ______________________________
(If retired, what was your principal occupation?)

12. If working, are you employed

____ full time (30 hours per week or more)
____ part time (less than 30 hours per week)
____ casual
____ other (please specify) ______________________________

13. What is your approximate gross yearly income

____ less than $20,000
____ $20,000 to $29,000
____ $30,000 to $39,000
____ $40,000 to $49,000
____ $50,000 to $59,000
____ over $60,000

14. Present religious preference

____ Protestant
____ Catholic
____ Jewish
____ no religious preference
____ other (please indicate) ______________________________

15. Religion in childhood

_____ Protestant
_____ Catholic
_____ Jewish
_____ none
_____ other (please indicate) ______________________________

16. Do you presently attend a church or house of worship

_____ once or twice a week
_____ once or twice a month
_____ once or twice every six months
_____ once or twice a year
_____ less than once a year
_____ never attend church or house of worship
_____ other (please specify)______________________________

17. On the whole, do you prefer to spend your leisure time

_____ alone with self
_____ alone with spouse
_____ with spouse and others
_____ with others (but not spouse)
_____ other (please specify)______________________________

18. How would you rate your relationship with your spouse

_____ very happy
_____ reasonably happy
_____ very unhappy
_____ other (please specify)______________________________

____

19. How would you rate your personal fulfillment

_____ very fulfilled
_____ reasonably fulfilled
_____ unfulfilled
_____ other (please specify)______________________________

____

SECTION II

20. When did **you personally** first decide you did not want to have children?

____ in childhood
____ in my teen years (13-19)
____ in my 20's
____ when my present spouse stated his/her opinion
____ never - the decision to remain childfree is due to my present relationship rather than my own desire not to have children
____ other (please specify)________________________________

Was this decision made **before** you met your present spouse?

____ yes
____ no
____ uncertain

21. When did **you and your spouse** make the decision to remain childfree?

____ before marriage
____ in the first year of marriage
____ 1 to 3 years after marriage
____ 4 to 6 years after marriage
____ more than 6 years after marriage
____ the decision was made for us when we postponed children until it became too late to have them
____ other (please specify)________________________________

22. Was the decision **with your spouse** to remain childfree

____ made suddenly
____ made gradually over a period of years
____ postponed until an undefined future time
____ postponed until children were no longer desirable
____ postponed until childbearing was no longer possible
____ other (please specify)________________________________

23. Who initiated the decision to remain childfree?

____ self
____ spouse
____ it was a mutual decision
____ other (please specify)________________________________

24. Who is presently more strongly committed to remaining childfree?

____ self
____ spouse
____ we are both equally committed
____ other (please specify)________________________________

25. What effect has the decision not to have children had on your relationship with your spouse?

____ no effect (our relationship would be the same with or without children)
____ positive effect
____ negative effect
____ other (please specify)________________________________

SECTION III

26. The following is a list of some of the reasons for making the childfree choice. Please check as many of the answers that influenced **your** decision not to have children.

____ presence of children would be detrimental to an intimate husband-wife relationship
____ would not enjoy my relationship with spouse as much if we had a child
____ greater time for self
____ importance of my career
____ importance of spouse's career
____ financial advantage of two incomes
____ career disadvantages having children might create
____ financial cost of children
____ wish to limit responsibilities
____ lifestyle not consistent with childrearing
____ freedom not to work
____ freer sexual relations
____ freedom to travel
____ long-term commitment of children
____ greater personal freedom if childfree
____ value spontaneity (which would be less possible with children)
____ concern for overpopulation
____ concern for bringing a child into the world in its present state
____ fear of deformed child or passing on an inherited condition
____ emotional cost to self
____ fear of pregnancy and childbirth
____ view pregnancy as unattractive or unpleasant
____ negative long-term effects of childbearing on a woman's body
____ dislike of children

____ view mother/fatherhood role as negative or undesirable
____ fear of not liking the child
____ uninterested in parenting
____ doubt personal competence in caring for a child
____ doubt spouse's compentence in caring for a child
____ view childcare as drudgery (i.e., dull, wearisome, menial work)
____ other (please specify)________________________________

____

____

____

SECTION IV

27. Please indicate the average amount of personal contact you have with children between the ages of infancy and 16 years

____ daily
____ once or twice a week
____ once or twice a month
____ once or twice every six months
____ once or twice a year
____ other (please specify)________________________________

28. On the whole, is this personal contact with children

____ very enjoyable
____ somewhat enjoyable
____ bearable
____ unpleasant
____ other (please specify)________________________________

29. Do you feel there are **disadvantages** to being childfree?

____ yes
____ no
____ uncertain

If you answered "yes" please indicate why (check as many answers as are applicable to you)

____ lack of family life
____ social isolation of childless couples
____ social pressure to have children

____ positive aspects of childrearing are lost
____ jealousy of others of your lifestyle
____ sense of non-continuance
____ loneliness in old age
____ lack of fulfillment
____ other (please specify)________________________________

____

____

____

30. Do you feel there are **advantages** to being childfree?

____ yes
____ no
____ uncertain

If you answered "yes" indicate why (check as many answers as are applicable to you)

____ greater independence
____ greater flexibility
____ financial advantages
____ occupational advantages
____ better relationship with spouse
____ better relationship with family members
____ fewer responsibilities
____ other (please specify)________________________________

____ greater mobility
____ greater freedom
____ fewer worries

31. Do you regret your choice to remain childfree?

____ yes
____ no
____ uncertain

If you answered "yes" indicate why (check as many answers as are applicable to you)

____ lack of family life
____ social isolation of childless couples
____ positive aspects of childrearing are lost
____ jealousy of others of your lifestyle
____ sense of non-continuance
____ loneliness in old age
____ lack of fulfillment
____ other (please specify)________________________________

32. What do you usually tell people when they ask why you do not have/are not planning to have children?

____ the truth
____ try to avoid answering
____ make up excuse for being childless
____ respond with a joke or humor
____ try to change the subject
____ reply that it is none of their business
____ have never been asked when I/we will have children
____ other (please specify)________________________________

33. Do you encounter pressure to have children?

____ a lot of pressure
____ some pressure
____ no pressure **(If you checked this response, please proceed to question 35)**
____ other (please specify)________________________________

If you do encounter a lot, or some pressure to have children, please give an example of the pressure

____

____

____

____

____

____

34. If you do encounter pressure to have children, from which of the following sources does it come? (check as many answers as are applicable to you)

____ spouse
____ parents
____ parents-in-law
____ other family members
____ television
____ newspaper
____ seeing parents with their children
____ other (please specify)________________________________

____ employer
____ friends
____ church
____ work associates
____ magazines

35. What do you perceive is the most common attitude of others to your childfree choice?

____ positive
____ negative
____ neutral
____ other (please specify)________________________________

36. Why do you suppose some people react negatively to childless couples? (check as many answers as are applicable to you)

____ jealousy and envy of the freedom of being childfree
____ regret having had their own children
____ feel that you are selfish
____ other (please specify)________________________________

SECTION V

37. Please indicate the method of birth control you use (check as many answers as are applicable to you)

____ sterilization (husband's)
____ sterilization (wife's)
(If you checked either of these two responses, please proceed to question 41)
____ birth control pill
____ condom
____ foam
____ IUD
____ diaphragm
____ other (please specify)________________________________

____ no contraceptives are used (please explain)________________

____

38. If you or your spouse **are not presently sterilized**, have you and your spouse discussed the possibility of sterilization?

____ yes ____ no

39. If you or your spouse **are not presently sterilized**, would you consider sterilization

____ at some time in the next year
____ at some time in the distant future

____ at no time, either now or in the future
____ uncertain about becoming sterilized
____ other (please specify)________________________________

40. If you or your spouse **are not presently sterilized and would** **not** **consider sterilization** as a method of birth control, is it because (check as many answers as are applicable to you)

____ the irrevocability of the procedure would not allow you to have a child should you change your mind about remaining childfree
____ it is your spouse's responsibility, not yours
____ you are afraid of the procedure
____ religious reasons prevent you from becoming sterilized
____ your spouse will not allow you to seek sterilization
____ other (please specify)________________________________

____

____

____

41. **Female Respondents: (male respondents please proceed to the following page)**

In the event of an accidental pregnancy would you:

____ have an abortion **with or without** husband's support
____ have an abortion but only **with** husband's support

____ go through with the pregnancy and adjust to parenthood **with or without** husband's support
____ go through with the pregnancy and adjust to parenthood but only **with** husband's support

____ give the child up for adoption **with or without** husband's support
____ give the child up for adoption but only **with** husband's support

____ I am uncertain as to what I would do
____ other (please specify) ________________________________

____

____

Male Respondents: (female respondents please proceed to next question)

In the event of an accidental pregnancy, would you:

_____ support wife's decision to have an abortion
_____ insist that wife have an abortion, even if she was uncertain about it

_____ want to have the child and adjust to parenthood **with or without** wife's support
_____ want to have the child and adjust to parenthood but only **with** wife's support

_____ give the child up for adoption **with or without** wife's support
_____ give the child up for adoption but only **with** wife's support

_____ I am uncertain as to what I would do
_____ other (please specify) ________________________________

____

____

____

____

42. Is there a possibility that you would consider having children in the future?

_____ yes
_____ no
_____ uncertain

43. In the event that you were to enter into another relationship, would you consider the possibility of having children with your new spouse?

_____ yes
_____ no
_____ uncertain

Please use this space to make any comments you may have about this survey.

____

____

____

Upon completion of this survey, please place it into the envelope provided and return it to the researcher.

Thank you for the time you have taken in completing this survey. Your input is invaluable to this research.